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fantastic

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CONTENTS

WATER CURE
By John Toland..... 6

THE SPIDERY PIED PIPERS
By Robert Moore Williams..... 56

THE COURTSHIP OF 53 SHOTL 9 G
By Niall Wilde 72

THE VICAR OF SKELETON COVE
By Lawrence Chandler..... 92

THE APPOINTMENT
By Raymond Stark 124

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. . . or so you say

• A few issues ago your editor, heeding the voice of many readers, reserved a page of FANTASTIC for a letters column. Because the voice of *other* readers had been raised in protest to any such "waste of space," we tried to please both factions by holding the column to one page only—and printing only excerpts from letters received.

The result: *nobody* was pleased. When Joe Epic, in Twisted Ulna, Nevada, sat down and knocked out five pages of protest against the kind of artwork appearing in our pages, he wanted to see that letter reproduced in its entirety—not a one-line summation saying "Phew!" Also, we further infuriated Joe by omitting his street address, thereby leaving him isolated from those readers who *liked* the artwork and who would write and tell him so if they only knew where to reach him.

Consequently, Mr. Epic stopped writing letters to us . . . and gradually so did other readers. And there we were, a clean and shining page waiting for letters and no letters to quote from . . . other than the usual "Dear sir, you cur" type of missive, or "Last night I saw a flying saucer."

The easy way out was to stick an ad in the vacant space and go on to other things. But a nagging doubt remained: were we being unfair to a considerable number of readers by so summarily dismissing the subject? Giving readers the back of the editorial hand comes under the heading of Suicide: Slow and Painful. As many an editor has learned.

On the other side of the ledger were those readers who wanted *no* Readers' Page. What about them? Putting in such a department would rile that group. In other words we'd be damned if we did and we'd be damned if we didn't. . . .

A decision had to be made. We've made it. Beginning just as soon as we have enough letters to start with, each issue of this magazine and of AMAZING STORIES, will carry a full-blown Readers' Page. No more excerpts. No more omission of addresses. You got something to say, Sir or Madam, say it and we'll use it. Love us or hate us—it all goes in. If it takes five pages, or ten, your letters will be printed. But there can be no department unless you write. Which, of course, puts it squarely up to you. Each letter used will have an editorial answer; and we promise to be as frank in our answer as you are in your statements.

Have fun!

—H. B.

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WATER CURE

BY JOHN TOLAND

You'd think a guy who could walk on water would be able to find wealth, health, and happiness by cashing in on his unique ability. Mr. Purdy thought so too—until he met the luscious Zev...

HE WAS about average in height and he walked with a studious stoop to his shoulders. Anyone interested in the slight figure of Frederick Purdy, thoughtfully climbing down the steep stone staircase from Riverside Drive, might have put his age at about forty. Actually he was a well-preserved forty-two.

No one could have guessed the storm of emotions that tossed Mr. Purdy, for his face was calm and emotionless. He had the look of a man who had parked his car under the viaduct for the night to avoid getting a ticket. But Mr. Purdy didn't even have a car. His beautiful wife Myra had a large Pontiac which he was allowed to ride in but he personally didn't even own the radiator cap.

Mr. Purdy, although engrossed in his personal disaster, efficiently dodged a car speeding towards the ramp leading to the West Side Highway. In a moment he was on a worn dock. Two fishermen, who had been coming to that dock for several years without getting a bite, ignored him as he tentatively looked into the murky, littered water. A nearby sewer kept whirling out odd bits of refuse which interested the little man for a few moments. Nothing illustrated the true democracy of mankind like the journey's end of a sewer, he thought.

He wrinkled his nose in disgust. It would not be nice to drown in this spot, even

"Ten dollars fine," the judge said, "for floating in court!"

while holding such a worthwhile philosophical thought. Frederick Purdy wrinkled his brow in thought. Deductive reasoning solved any problem, he knew. He suddenly smiled. The intellectual approach, so often sneered at by men of action, was justified. There was an old rowboat under the dock.

He clumsily descended a slimy, rickety ladder and thudded into the equally slimy boat. Hurriedly he untied the rowboat and pushed off from the dock. He was embarked on life's last adventure.

That there was only one oar in the boat merely added to the poetic pleasure of the little man. For as he stood heroically, if a bit shakily, in the middle of the boat like a gondolier, he imagined himself a modern Charon.

It took Fredrick half an hour to paddle a hundred yards off shore. When he was satisfied with the comparative sanitation of the water he calmly began taking off his clothes. The suit had cost $200 and Myra would be very upset if it got wet, for with a dart in the trousers it would fit their son, Myron. In a moment he was down to his BVDs.

Why Fredrick Purdy, who hadn't been sick since he had a nasty case of measles at six, would want to shuffle off his mortal coil that Sunday would have been a mystery to the average tabloid reader. He had a beautiful wife and two healthy children, both smarter than they should be, and no financial worries. At the age of twenty he had invented a carburetor which was still being used on one of America's most popular cars. At twenty-one he had married Myra Bottomley, who efficiently took over his growing financial problems and relieved him of all responsibilities and worries by having all his interests signed over to her. After one year she produced a girl, Mildred, and after two years a boy, Myron. At that point, Fredrick informed her of the Malthusian Theory and she, obligingly, ceased production.

Fredrick took off his tortoise shell glasses for which he had no optical use whatever. They were the result of canny reasoning at the age of twelve when he had pretended bad eyesight so he could have some sort of protection from husky school bullies.

He sighed as he put his fragile friends on top of his clothing. But it wouldn't be

fair to take them with him on his last sad but necessary journey. And besides they might break and cut his eyes and that was an unappealing idea.

Fredrick slowly stood up on the middle seat of the rowboat. Certain people, who seem to have the inside track on such things, say that a man's life passes in review in the last two seconds of his existence. The only thing that passed in review for Fredrick was the miserable scene of the night before when his wife, furious that he hadn't invented anything in twenty-two years had ripped his precious books on Indian Philosophy to bits.

"You're nothing but a bum!" the still beautiful Myra had screamed in her rage. "Sitting around all day reading your lousy books while we starve!"

When he had quietly replied that starvation at $15,000 a year was a consummation that most wives devoutedly wished for, he had been struck on the head with "So You Want To Levitate," a heavily documented but popularly angled tome by Shyam Lal. It hadn't been one of his favorites like the classic "Yoga for You" and Rash Bahari's "Mother Ganges or Observations from the Steps of the Rashashvamedh Ghat," because of its rather frivolous approach but it still was treasured.

Fredrick sighed. Wasn't it Mahatma Gandhi who had said that man should treasure each moment of pain and unhappiness because it led him to his final victory? No, it wasn't Gandhi. But the idea was fairly common. The whole theory of sleeping on spikes belonged to that school. And next to sleeping on spikes, which he had given up quickly because he was so ticklish, living in Apt. 3D of the Buckingham Arms took an honorable place. Although the rent was high, he had no privacy and whenever he turned on WQXR for some musical salve his wife stonily entered his 'study' and switched on her favorite program.

A flash of sunlight broke through a cloud like the final shot of an inspirational religious movie from Warner Brothers. Fredrick blinked at the sudden light and then, his mind cleared of all material trivia, he calmly steped off the boat.

A wave of peace swept over Fredrick in that split second. But that was all that

did sweep over him. For Fredrick's feet didn't sink below the surface of the water. He was as jarred as though he had landed on concrete. The little man's hair stood on edge. As his alert, if somewhat repellent son Myron would have put it, he flipped his wig. Thinking he had landed on a sand bar or a submerged buoy, he took a hesitant step forward. But there was no hole in the water.

Thoughts of suicide were swept away as he ran excitedly along the top of the gentle waves. He had done it! By some strange quirk of fate he had achieved a form of levitation! The sun hurriedly ducked behind a cloud as though afraid of what it had seen.

His heart came close to bursting with joy. All his years of research and study hadn't been fruitless. Shyam Lal, indeed, would be proud of him. Wild with enthusiasm, forgetting his unconventional attire, he sprinted for the shore. Myra should be the first to know! This was even more inspirational than the night twenty-two years ago when he woke from a sound sleep with the revolutionary idea to put that extra hole in the carburetor.

When he was fifty yards from the river bank a girl, her eyes red and weary, looked up tiredly from her rocky couch at the edge of the water.

The girl screamed.

Fredrick startled by the scream suddenly dropped from sight.

"Blllllb!" shouted Fredrick as he came up for the first time. The girl, her mouth still open in amazement, could have posed for a statue named Aghast.

"Blll!" said Fredrick on his second trip up.

The girl sprang into life as she kicked off her spiked heel shoes and dove into the messy river. She reached the little man just as he had uttered "Bl!" and was preparing to descend for the last time.

Fortunately Fredrick had strong hair and a lot of it and he lost only a small handful of it on the trip to shore. As he lay panting on a damp rock, the girl stared down at him accusingly.

"What the hell you think you're doing? "You've got a nerve."

"I'm sorry," replied Fredrick automatically. For it was his reply to almost everything Myra told him.

"Sorry for what?" She blinked her eyes. "Did you do what I thought I saw you do?"

"I . . . ah. . . .

"Now that's a pretty silly answer." She suddenly burst into laughter. "Oh, brother, I haven't seen those since granddaddy left for parts unknown." She pointed at his listless BVDs.

"Oh, my goodness!" Suddenly aware of his deshabille, Fredrick tried to hide behind the rock.

"Look, mister. I'm still a bit groggy from last night." Fredrick noticed for the first time that the girl wore an evening gown almost as low in the front as it was in the back. Little suction cups must be keeping it fastened to the girl, he thought. "As a matter of fact I'm damned groggy, grogged to the eyeballs. But I thought I saw you . . . ugh . . . oh, no. Pink elephants I don't mind . . . even little green men . . . but this means the end is near." She jammed her fists into her eyes.

Fredrick pulled up his knees and primly hugged himself. "You weren't seeing things, Miss," he said quietly.

"You . . . mean . . ."

"I was walking on the water."

The girl shook her head. "Oh, no. I'm imagining this whole thing. This is impossible!"

Fredrick looked at her with some surprise. He was also a little hurt. "My dear young woman, what you saw was not impossible. I merely attained a form of levitation."

"You attained levi-whattion?"

"Levitation. A—you might call it a bastard form of levitation."

"Now you're talking my language. It was a bastard all right."

"Perfect levitation would mean I could raise my body with no physical means above the earth." His eyes sparkled. "Some day I may make true levitation!" He broke out into shivers. "Oh, my goodness, what am I going to do?"

The girl, fascinated by the little man, was in a semi-daze.

"My clothes!"

"Huh? Oh, why don't you put them on?"

"They're in the boat."

"What boat?"

"The boat I jumped from. It's out. . . ." He pointed vaguely but no boat was visible. Time and tide had carried the rowboat out of sight.

"You know," said the girl slowly, "I don't believe there ever was a boat. And I don't believe there ever was a you."

"My dear young woman," said Fredrick pedantically, "my physical presence should prove my existence. The mere

fact that you have witnessed an unusual occurence should not upset your deductive reasoning. I am here, therefore I am."

"Well, I am here but soon I am not. I'm getting the hell out." The girl scrambled to her feet and started to walk away.

"Please!" Fredrick looked up at her helplessly. "What'll I do?"

The girl, her name was Zev, had always been a soft touch for birds with broken wings and hungry cats, so she hesitated. The mother instinct in her was touched by Fredrick's agonized look.

"No mirage could look so miserable," she concluded. "You must be real." She leaned towards him as if to touch him. She did more than that. She pinched him.

"Owwww!" shouted Fredrick.

"My God, you *are* real." Then she adopted a cooing tone. "And you're as cold as a. . . ." She searched for the mot juste.

"Icicle," chattered the helpful Fredrick.

"As a icicle. You poor thing." She reached behind the rock and pulled out a fur stole which she draped around Fredrick's neck. "You can't blame a girl for doubting. . . ." She stopped and gulped. "You didn't really—"

"You're so provincial! You never saw a man walking on water before. Therefore you think it can't be done."

"It's crazy. Frankly, I don't believe it. It just. . . ."

Fredrick sighed as he laid the stole on the rock. "Here goes." He put his foot in the water. "Ohhhh! It's cold!" Then a calm, detached expression came on his face. He reminded Zev of one of Rubens' older cherubs. He took a bold step into the Hudson River.

"You're . . . you're standing on something," stammered Zev.

"Certainly." He took a few more steps. "On water." Exhilarated anew by the experience, he executed an old-fashioned but spirited dance, half jig and half schottishe, and then ran back to the girl.

"Well?" he asked draping the stole around his goose-pimply neck. He seemed almost as tall as the girl in his triumph.

"There—there must be a reason for it," she said slowly as though the words stuck to her throat.

"Of course there's an explanation." In a few minutes he confused her further with his theories.

"Hey you, whassa big idea, huh?"

The two looked up to see one of New York's finest, though a bit potty in the middle, hopping over rocks towards them.

"Whassa big idea, you two?"

"You mean us, officer?" asked Fredrick.

"Who you think I mean? Them pigeons?" He pointed at a couple of curious birds which had been attracted to the scene.

"Sea gulls," corrected Fredrick. "From the family—"

"Don't give me any your lip, Jack. Whatya mean, you two?"

"Aw, go fly a kite," put in Zev, who had had much more contact with the forces of law and order.

"Look, lady, you want a little trip to the nearest station?"

"What's eating you, Commissioner? Is it against the law to sit on a rock?"

"Swimming!" shouted the officer. "Yuh can't swim here. It's against the law. Don't tell me you ain't been swimming. You're all wet!"

"My dear man," said Zev. "We have been swimming at the Yale Club."

"But that's for men."

Zev wiggled her eyebrows. "That's why I always swim there."

"Uh, officer—sir—please—" put in the meek-mannered Fredrick. "This has all been an accident. I—ah—fell in the river and this young lady, who is a total stranger to me, jumped in and saved my life."

"Yeah?" The policeman was mollified. This would make a nice story for the papers. Then his face clouded. "Where yuh clothes, Jack?"

"Why I—ah—"

"I tore them off Jack when I rescued him," said Zev. "It was a terrible struggle."

"You tore . . . I'm supposed to believe that? Come on, you two." He pointed to a police car parked next to an empty freight car. "You come along with me."

The girl shrugged her shoulders lackadaisically. "Okay, friend." She held out her arm to Fredrick. "At least let's be dignified about it."

Fredrick quickly lost his oriental inscrutability. Thoroughly frightened at the thought of iron bars, his knees shaking in cold and fear, he picked his way across the refuse-littered field.

"Hey, don't I know you from somewhere?" the policeman suddenly asked Zev.

"I should hope so," flung

out the girl. "I've been a customer at your crummy precinct station enough. Take a close look."

"Oh, my God, ain't you Zev Forbes, girl goon?"

Zev drew herself up proudly. "How would you like a sock in the kisser?"

"You are!"

The policeman backed away with the respect he would have shown the young Joe Louis. "No offense attended, lady, I—I just . . ." He remembered the brother patrolman who had attempted to stop the society debutante's roller-skating down Fifth Avenue in the Easter Parade. Officer Zakorsky would carry a little lump behind his right ear to his death-bed. And then there were the two cops who had taken a dim view of her attempt to rescue a cat stranded on top the huge Christmas tree in Rockefeller Plaza. Although no bones had been broken, spirits had been, and both men of the law had requested patrol duty in the wilds of Corona.

Zev majestically opened the rear door of the police car for Fredrick. "Your carriage, sire."

"Hey, you can't get in there," stammered the now cowering protector of the innocent.

"You want me to ride up front with you?" she asked.

"I mean get outa my car. I don't want no trouble with you. Get lost." An unofficial order had come down from the Mayor himself that the next man who arrested Zev Forbes would be suspended. His Honor figured she was getting a better press than he, and such antics shouldn't be encouraged with publicity.

"Radcliffe Manor, boy," said the imperturbable Zev as she pushed Fredrick into the car. "Between 137th and 138th on the Drive."

"But you can't—"

"You don't expect us to walk home in our condition? Remember Zakorsky," warned Zev, staring at the policeman.

"But I mean—"

"And O'Brien and Mulholland."

"Yes, ma'am." He meekly got into the front seat and drove off. He was so beaten he even forgot to use the siren.

Fifteen minutes later Fredrick, his body blanketed and his feet soaking in hot water, was seated in Zev's best armchair in her tiny 2½-room apartment.

The apartment was an extension of the girl's personality. It was brilliantly, if

chaotically, decorated with original paintings of the Impressionist, Dadaist, and Mouse-Track Schools. The furniture, too, came from several periods. There was a genuine cobbler's bench, 2½ pieces of a Mission living-room suite and several assorted Salvation Army type chairs and tables. The chairs, sofa and tables were informally draped with petticoats, brassieres, panties and limp stockings. Books poured out of a once respectable but now windowless case.

"Are you the one who's always getting engaged?" asked Fredrick stifling a sneeze.

"Whatya mean, *always* getting engaged? That's a loose way of describing me. I have gone weeks without getting engaged. Get your feet back in the water." she commanded relentlessly.

"Hmmmm," replied Fredrick, cocking his head like a curious robin who sees a three-headed worm.

"In 1950 I was voted Debutante of the Year by the gentlemen of the Fifth Estate."

"Fourth," corrected Fredrick.

"In 1951 I was elected Miss Beer-Foam by the Bartender's Local and in 1953 I was thunderingly acclaimed Girl Most Likely to Get a Head by the International Cannibal Association."

There was a brief pause.

"What happened in 1952?" asked Fredrick.

"I spent most of '52 in old Doc Cramer's Home for D.M.s."

"D.M.s?"

"Dipsomaniacs, ignoramus. I was sent back two months ago for a refresher course but good old Doc Cramer said I was bad for morale and barred his padded doors to me. As you see I have solved my problem by getting nearer to the higher things in Life." She pointed to a pile of paper-bound books. "I major in Mickey Spillane. For lighter reading I dip into Dostoevsky, Gorky, and Proust." She indicated the crammed bookcase.

"Very interesting," clucked Fredrick. "But I thought debutantes lived on Park Avenue."

"My father came from a fine old honest family. So honest they lost all their money to the fine old crooked families. Daddy," she nodded politely to an oil painting which looked like a startled owl going south, "spent the last of the family money collecting antiques."

"Commendable if unprofitable."

"Antique chorus girls. He also backed every horse that ever came in second. I was named after a horse, you know. Remember the great Zev?"

"I certainly do." Fredrick smiled shyly. "Twenty years ago I worked out an infallible system to beat the—what do you call them? Ah, yes. Bookmakers. I shall never forget the great match race between Zev and In Memoriam."

"Thank God, Zev won," said the girl with relief. "I'd have felt pretty damn silly going through life being called In Memoriam. Get your feet back in the water!" the stern girl shouted.

"But it's so difficult to keep them submerged," replied Fredrick apologetically. "They keep popping up to the surface. See!" He forced his feet under water with a supreme effort but immediately they were flung upwards.

"My God, I need a drink!" The girl tottered to the kitchen and returned in a moment with a glass and a bottle. "How about the same for you, Freddy?"

"I have never indulged in any intoxicating beverage."

"Huh? You mean in simple language you never quaffed the nectar of the gods?"

The little man nodded with pride. "I find sufficient intoxication in my books."

The girl poured out half a tumblerful of Old Forester and handed it to Fredrick. "Toss this off, boy, before you get pneumonia."

"But I—"

"You're not catching pneumonia in my apartment! Drink it!"

"But—" She glared at him until he shrugged his shoulders and sipped the liquid. "Hmmmm," he commented. "Very smooth." He emptied the glass and then smiled. "Has a nice medicinal flavor." He smiled again and held out the glass. "I think this is helping my throat. I feel a slight warm glow."

"Slight!" She looked at him with a mixture of amazement and admiration.

Taking the bottle out of her hand, he poured a full glass which he emptied as though it had been milk.

"Frankly I'm a bit disappointed," he said softly. "I'd heard liquor was powerful."

"My dream man!" she murmured worshipfully. "I always knew if I waited long enough I'd find you."

"Miss Forbes," said Fredrick softly looking up at her with apologetic eyes, "Don't you think—"

Fredrick's sentence was blasted to oblivion by antagonistic pounding on the apartment door.

"Open this door!" shouted a shrill, piercing female voice.

"Myra!" sighed Fredrick resignedly.

"Your wife?" asked Zev. He nodded. "How the devil did she find out you were here?"

"There is a very efficient spy system at the Buckingham Arms among the wives. I've often thought the Government should use it instead of radar." He started for the door.

"Where the devil you think you're going?" whispered Zev.

"Open this door! I know my husband is in there!"

"I'm going to let her in. Every second she waits will make her that much more suspicious and angry."

"You can't let her in with you like that!" She pointed an accusing finger at his clinging BVDs. "Get in the bedroom. In the closet you'll find a man's suit." She pushed him into the bedroom, closed the door and then opened the quivering apartment door.

"Where is he?" A beautiful but angry woman in her early forties pushed her way into the apartment. A boy of sixteen with wavy blond hair and a dumpy girl of eighteen followed. "All right now, where is the worm?"

Zev assumed an indignant pose. "What right have you got to break into my apartment like this? How dare you?"

"How dare I? I like that!"

"Where is the old goat?" asked the boy. He had his mother's supercilious nose and he wiggled it like a fastidious rabbit.

The bedroom door slowly opened and a meek head peered around the corner. "Hello, dear."

"I'll hello dear, you. You philandering old fool; Mrs. Swartzkopf saw you swimming in the river with this creature, from the apartment roof."

"How could she possibly see that far?" asked Zev.

"She has a telescope," informed Fredrick. He stepped into the room. The suit in the closet had belonged to Zev's father. The elder Forbes had been well over six feet and the jacket almost reached Fredrick's knees.

"So it is true!" exploded the angry wife.

"What's true?" asked Fredrick in the interests of public information.

"Mrs. Swartzkopf told us you were swimming."

"B.A.," finished the boy, Myron.

"B.A.?" queried Fredrick. "Isn't that a degree?"

"It certainly is. The lowest!" Myra shied a Mickey Spillane novel at her husband's head. He ducked with the practise of years and the book splattered against a wall and flew to pieces along the carpet.

"My favorite pornography!" shouted Zev angrily. "Whose books you think you're throwing?" She took several running steps towards the surprised woman and then slapped her rear, hard, with the palm of her hand.

The shot heard round the world at Lexington may have had more historical importance but the hollow smack as Zev's strong hand connected with its target opened up a brave new world to Fredrick. There was someone stronger than Myra. In the days of Hitler and Mussolini, Fredrick always secretly felt that if they ever came face to face with Myra their dictatorships would crumble.

Three large Os appeared on the faces of Myra and her two children.

"There's been a misunderstanding," placated the still amazed Fredrick. "I happened to fall in the water and Miss Forbes saved my life."

"In those clothes?" asked Myra with as much sarcasm as she could muster. She was careful to sidle away from the still glowering Zev.

"I. . . . " He sighed. "Oh, what's the use? You'd never believe the truth and I'm too tired to think up any lies. So you'll have to use your imagination."

"I'll use something on you." Myra advanced towards Fredrick. The little man didn't cower. With the stoicism born of years of study he merely bowed his head like a sacrificial lamb.

"You touch him and I'll kick you where you live!" growled Zev.

"I'll have the police on you," stammered the humiliated woman.

Zev's eyes flashed. "I'll sue you for breaking in my apartment and destroying my valuable books! The cops around here know me!"

"They really do," warned Fredrick. "You should see them hop when she talks to them. Can't we discuss this like civilized human beings? The most wonderful thing in the world has just happened!"

The dumpy girl suddenly burst into tears.

"What're you crying for?"

asked her mother turning her anger in that defenseless direction.

"No one's let me say a word," blubbered the girl.

"What's this wonderful thing?" asked Myra suspiciously. "You mean you've fallen in love with this—this —" Zev raised her right arm. ". . . this young girl?"

"No, no. I finally achieved partial levitation. I can walk on water!"

There was a slight pause.

"Are you trying to be funny or did you fall on your head?" asked Myra.

"He *can* walk on water," said Zev quietly.

"Oh, brother, let's get outa this creepy joint," advised Myron.

Suspiciously Myra approached her husband. "I think you've been drinking." She smelled his breath. "You *have* been drinking! You've violated your vow!"

"It was merely to keep me from getting a sure case of pneumonia."

"Better a dozen deaths from pneumonia than this. A reeling, pitiful wreck!"

"Myra, I'm as sober as a judge and I did walk on water. Here, I'll prove it to you. I'll stand on top the water in this pan." He walked over to the pan of warm water into which he had futilely bathed his feet. "Watch."

Eight eyes watched intently as he calmly and confidently stepped into the pan. His right foot, still shoeless, plunged to the bottom of the pan.

"You lying drunk!" Myra was again triumphant.

"But I don't understand." Fredrick put his other foot in the pan and that, too, sank. He stood scratching his head in puzzlement. "There must be some explanation."

"You bet there's some explanation," cried Myra. "I don't ever want to see you again!"

"But Myra." He stepped out of the pan and, dripping water, ran to her.

"And don't you try sneaking back in the apartment!"

"But I—"

"Your lady friend can take care of you."

"You bet I will!" put in Zev. "He's well rid of you, you old Harpy!"

"Come children." She gathered the two like a mother hen attacked by a hawk. "We'll leave your father here with his . . . eh . . . lady friend." When she got to the door she turned dramatically. "And what's more, Fredrick, don't try to collect your al-

lowance at the bank Monday. You won't get another cent out of me, you—you wolf!" She pushed her children out the door and then followed. The door slammed.

"What a b-i-t-c—" started Zev.

"—h," finished Fredrick absently. "This poses quite a problem."

"Let me call a lawyer. I don't think she can stop your allowance legally. How much was it a week?"

"Five dollars."

"Oh, hell, let's have another drink." She picked up the empty bottle, looked at Fredrick with wonder, and then began pacing the room restlessly. "My forty-five bucks a week won't be enough for both of us. We've got to think of ways to get more money."

"My dear Miss Forbes, don't you think you're taking this too seriously? My wife lost her temper. In a few hours she'll be reasonable and—"

"Your wife won't ever be reasonable. You couldn't go back and live with her, could you? After trying to drown yourself because of her?"

"There's a certain rude logic in what you say."

"Rude schmood. That dame is strictly poison, of the nastiest brand. I'm going to see that you make a million dollars. Any guy that can walk on water should be able to turn over an honest buck."

"But I must have lost the gift! I just failed a minute ago!"

"As you said, there's an explanation. C'mon!" She grabbed him by the hand. "You and I are driving out to the country to my favorite pond. We're going to experiment."

His eyes brightened. "Miss Forbes, it's very gratifying to find one so young and attractive interested in the scientific approach."

"Aw, can the chatter. Let's blow before Devil Bat returns with the cops."

"Devil Bat? Oh, you mean Myra!"

"Yes. Let's go."

"There's only one thing that's been puzzling me," he said stopping at the doorway.

"What's that?"

"What does B.A. mean?"

Zev looked at him affectionately. "It means Bare—" She patted him on the head. "You're too cute to know."

In an hour the 1939 Cadillac was struggling up a steep hill just off the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut.

"Your motor doesn't sound very good," observed Fredrick technically.

"It doesn't mote very good either."

"That's funny. Cadillac motors are supposed to last for many years."

"Oh, it isn't a Cadillac motor. This is probably the only Cadillac in the world with a Franklin motor. It's a symbol of my entire life. Let's not get off the main topic. Review the facts again."

He sighed. "Twice I sank."

"Sunk."

"Sank," insisted Fredrick. "Once in the Hudson when you first shouted at me. And once in the pan of water in the apartment. The first time I can explain. I was startled from my complete state of absorption."

"Didn't your wife startle you in the apartment?" asked the girl hopefully.

He shook his head. "I have not been startled by my wife since 1932. I merely sank."

"Sunk."

"Sunk." His brows furrowed "I simply can't. . . ."

"Well, we'll soon know the answer." She turned off the winding macadam road onto a dirt path. After bumping over rocks and stumps for a hundred yards she brought the now boiling car to a stop. Birds sang and leaves rustled and the exhausted Franklin motor gurgled. "Last stop, Freddy." She shook her dreamy partner.

"Oh." He looked around curiously. "Very peaceful. Very nice. What a place to achieve Nirvana!" He methodically took off the enormous jacket and shirt. He then curled his legs under him. "I think I'd better observe my navel for several hours first. Just to get in the mood."

"Not today, Josephine." She pulled him out of the car and down a winding woodland path. "I found the prettiest lake you ever saw down here. I go swimming in it almost every day. It's cheaper than Jones Beach and you don't have to wear anything."

In a few minutes they burst out of the thick woods and came onto a pretty, round deserted lake. It was no more than a quarter of mile in diameter and the shores were lined with water lilies.

"Isn't this a beaut?" said the girl pointing proudly. "I call it Minnetonka, after my aunt."

Both stood silently at the edge of the gently lapping water for a full minute, drinking in the scene.

"Well," started Fredrick in a small voice. He hesitated. "Well. Well. . . ."

" 'Three wells make a river',

said the fun-loving Rover boy. Go ahead."

Fredrick carefully buttoned the jacket which he had modestly put on again. "It will be interesting to find out whether time and place were factors or . . ."

"This suspense is killing me!" The girl pushed him.

"Well, as they say in the Air Corps, 'Off We.' " With a forced smile he stepped boldly into the water. He sank to his knees in soft mud. He floundered for a moment and then slopped back to dry land.

"Personally I think we were both drunk down at the Hudson. You never *did* walk on the water."

"It could have been mass hallucination," agreed the little man. "But I don't think so." He sat down thoughtfully. "Let's think this out. We should duplicate the conditions as much as possible. Now, I was in the rowboat. I took off my—" He jumped to his feet with excitement. "That's it! I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"No clothes!" He quickly ripped off the jacket and shirt and was struggling with his pants' zipper.

"My dear Freddy, don't think I'm stuffy but there's a reasonable facsimile of a lady present."

"Don't you see?" He was now slipping off her father's mammoth shoes.

"With the well known 20-20. And you're very cute even if there isn't much of you. But a lady likes to be asked first."

He stood before her in her father's safety-pinned shorts. He looked at her seriously. "Don't you understand? I only had underclothes on when I walked on the Hudson."

"Oh!" Dawn broke. "And I thought it was. . . ." There was a note of regret in her voice.

"Watch me!" he interrupted. With confidence he jumped forward. There was scarcely a splash. He hopped up and down on the water like a rabbit the day before Easter. "See! See!" Then he ran to a bunch of water lilies and pulling up a few pads, threw them joyfully into the air. "I can do it!"

After a few minutes of emotional cavorting he skipped back to Zev. He was breathing heavily, but smiling. Her face was pale.

"I've got a couple of books at our beach house at Fire Island," he said rapidly. "Maybe they'll explain about the clothes. Maybe it's my metabolism. Maybe it's. . . ."

Zev was looking at him

worshipfully. "And I used to think Jimmy Blane was wonderful," she gasped.

"Who was Jimmy Blane?" he asked.

"You don't know Jimmy Blane?" She looked at him incredulously. "Why he's the Harvard boy that ate 137 live goldfish!" She suddenly jerked him up the path. "C'mon!"

"Where we going." He followed her through the woods, the wet bottoms of his trousers slopping against his ankles.

"To the *Daily News!* This is bigger than Bobo!"

Three hours later Zev and Fredrick were sitting disconsolately on a bench in Bryant Park.

"How stupid can people get?" muttered the girl. "I swear I'll never read another '*News*' over any one's shoulder again!"

Four representatives of the Photo Newspaper had considered them a bit on the loony side when Zev offered to let the *News* sponsor the first foot crossing of the Hudson at $5000. Although they had taken a dozen pictures of the enthusiastic pair, it was looked on by two of the newspapermen as just another in the long line of Zev's crack-pot escapades and by the other two as something worthy of observation in the silly ward at Bellevue.

Instead of coming across with $5000 they called the cops, and got a dozen more pictures.

At the precinct station they were given a long fatherly talk by a kindly sergeant who begged them to give up liquor, which still clung affectionately to their breaths; and a short brotherly talk was delivered by a lieutenant, who informed them that any attempt to cross the Hudson without the Ferry would result in thirty days on the Island. He forgot to say which Island, but the warning was sufficient to discourage the attempt; particularly since there would be no photographers present.

"I've got it!" suddenly shouted Zev.

Before Fredrick could answer "Got what?" she was pulling him towards the now sepulchral Public Library.

"Herman Boseman," explained Zev.

"Herman B—"

"Don't be so dense." They were now zigzagging across Fifth Avenue.

"But who's—"

"He's been trying to get me to be a chanteuse for the last two years. He says I

could make Dwight Fiske blush."

"This is all—"

"Sometimes you're stupider than Jimmy Blane."

"Who's Jimmy Blane?"

"He's the Harvard boy who swallowed 138 live—"

"137," corrected Fredrick pedantically.

No conversation passed until they got to Third Avenue and 44th St.

"Now you let me do the talking," she said as they stood panting in a dingy hallway.

"May I ask—"

"Yes, he's on the second floor." She scampered up the dirty stairway and pounded on a door. "Open up. Vice Squad. Any vice today?" she shouted.

In a moment the door slowly opened and a fat, bleary-eyed man blinked at them.

"I thought it was you," he said huskily. He sounded like a walrus with tonsilitis.

"This is Freddy. Freddy this is Herman. Now let's get down to business." She pushed the fat man onto his mussed-up bed. "My God, you keep terrible hours. Perhaps you should move to the 'Y'. Freddy here has got a socko act."

The fat man groaned. "Before coffee I gotta listen to this?" He started to rise.

Zev pushed him back on the bed. "This is big, Herman. Bigger than your idea to make a song and dance team out of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray."

"They would of killed 'em!" mused Herman wistfully.

"Wait'll you hear what this boy does!"

"Before my coffee?" He started off the bed.

"No wonder the Morris Agency drummed you out of the corps. You're too material."

"Okay, what does he do? Balance on ten chairs?"

"He walks on water," announced Zev dramatically.

"So he walks on water. What else?"

The girl was aghast. "What *else?*"

"You can't just walk on water. Does he dance? sing? juggle? Maybe tell a few spicy stories?"

Zev slapped the agent's cheeks sharply. "Wake up, boy. I said *he walks on water.*"

"I heard you the first time. He walks on . . . *What!*"

"You've got the only brain I know of that slows up sound," Zev commented frostily.

The fat man smiled weakly. "It was a good gag. Now let me sleep."

Zev shook him roughly. "Herman, I'm not making gags. This guy walked on the Hudson River this morning. This noon he walked on the waters of Minnetonka."

"You don't expect me to—" gasped the pajamed man.

"You got a bathtub?"

"Of course I got a bathtub," he replied indignantly. "Where else you think I keep my dirty clothes?"

The girl ran to the bathroom and there was the sound of running water. "Come on in and watch him. Hey, Freddy," she commanded to the little man, "Get ready."

Without a word Freddy started taking off his clothes.

"A male stripper!" gasped Herman. "Hey, I think you got something. This'll kill 'em in Jersey City. What a switcheroo! That other baloney was just a build-up, huh? Pretty good."

"Come in the bathroom," ordered Zev, ignoring the fat man's monologue.

"But, you don't seriously—"

"Come in. Now sit down."

The fat man did.

"Okay. Now this is the way I see it. We get someone like Ronald Colman, you know real dignified, to announce the act. He gives a little history of water walking. He whips the audience into a frenzy. . . ."

The fat man, his face sunk in his hands, groaned. "Maybe Spencer Tracy would be better," he put in bitterly.

"Then the orchestra starts playing softly."

"Benny Goodman, I suppose?"

"The New York Philharmonic. This is no cheap vaudeville act! I don't know what music we'll use. . . ."

"Handel's 'Water Music'?" suggested the until-then silent Fredrick.

"You shut up. Something mysterioso and grave. Like Bach's 'Pascacaglia'. . . ."

"A real Hit Parade selection," muttered the now disgusted Herman, tired of what he thought was certainly a joke.

"And then," whispered Zev, "a thunderbolt of lights hits Freddy . . . dressed in a sequined white robe—"

"It has to be shorts or BVDs," corrected Fredrick.

"Sequined white robe," continued Zev relentlessly. "He throws off the robe and there he is in all his pristine glory . . . shorts with rhinestones. Then he steps on the water. . . ." She motioned frantically to Fredrick who stepped into the bathtub. He calmly walked on top of the water towards Herman.

"Oh, no!" Herman's face

became gray and he slid off his seat into blessed unconsciousness.

"I tell you kids, we'll make millions!" exulted Herman as the souped-down Cadillac sputtered up a very slight rise in the country road. They were in the verdant Catskills, land of Boy Scout camps and summer hotels.

Ever since Herman had regained consciousness the previous day he had been entranced by the possibilities of Fredrick's water-walking act.

"But why do we have to open way up here in the sticks?" complained Zev.

"Sticks? The Borscht Circuit is more Broadway than Broadway itself in the summer," replied the agent heatedly. "You go over at Grossman's, you go over anywhere."

"I'm not sure I like all this," said Fredrick softly.

"Like all what?" asked the other two in duet.

"This business of capitalizing on . . . my gift."

"Gift, what's a gift?" asked Herman. "The Lord gives you a crazy talent, you gotta use it. You owe it to people to show what you got." This dubious line of reasoning came easily to Herman, for he had spent the past few weeks convincing a leading and impoverished ballerina to do a strip tease to the Dying Swan.

"It just doesn't seem right," protested Fredrick.

"You need money to go on with your studies," encouraged Zev.

"Well, I guess you're right." Herman and Zev sighed with relief. "I only hope this commercialization doesn't make me lose my powers."

"Oh, my God!" moaned Herman. "Mebbe I should stick to guys shot outa cannons."

They passed a sign which read "GROSSMAN'S — Your Happy Land — One Mile Ahead — Swimming, Fishing, Golf, Tennis, Broadway Entertainment."

"I didn't tell Schultz what kind of act you are," said Herman. "He's the owner. If I told him on the phone he'd say I was drunk. I just said you was colossal, greater than Henny Youngman. For the first week you get lodging and all you can eat."

"I thought you said it was two hundred a week," snapped Zev.

"Well, that's about what it would come to with swimming and golf privileges. You also get free surf-boarding. Money's immaterial. You should know that."

"You're a thief," remarked Zev.

"So? Money's immaterial in this case. What do I get out of the act? Ten percent of all the lox you two can eat. But let me tell you something. There's a dozen producers in these here woods. All Freddy here has got to do is one good show and it's the bigtime for us."

"I guess you're right, Herman."

"Herman is always right," affirmed Herman. "Hey, look out! It's the Ku Klux Klan!"

Zev brought the Cadillac to a jarring stop just missing a half dozen men and women dressed in sheets. The men had beards. A large cardboard sign pointing down a woodland path read: "WORLD CONGRESS — APOSTLES OF PETER."

"Crackpots," observed Zev.

"I wonder!" mused Fredrick out loud.

"You wonder what?" asked the girl.

"I wonder if they wear anything under the sheets."

Herman looked at the serious-faced Fredrick and then shrugged his shoulders at Zev.

The girl patted the pensive little man on the head. "He's my boy," she said proudly.

The main building of the widespread venture known as Grossman's was a huge five story structure built on the edge of a cliff. If Frank Wright were asked what school of architecture it belonged to he probably would answer with a scream.

Jerome Schultz had received the initial inspiration for the building on a jaunt ten years before in the Swiss Alps. He had been intrigued by a picturesque chalet which he had ordered reproduced, "Only bigger."

The massive 128 room result was stuck in the Catskills like one of Goya's more gruesome castles. Below it lay the usual nine-hole golf course, a dozen tennis courts and a gem-like lake, called, naturally, Echo Lake, even though you could stand on its shores and shout all day long without getting an answer.

The huge dining room had just been cleared of its lunch wreckage. The last bits of food had been swept off the floor.

On the deserted bandstand a little group was having a discussion.

"You big bonehead!" screamed a small but muscular red-haired man, his hands balled into fists.

"Let's keep personalities

out of this," calmly replied Herman.

"Our new show opens tonight and you bring this creep for the headliner!" The red-haired man shook an accusing finger at Fredrick.

"Who you calling a creep?" challenged Zev drawing the man's necktie tightly against his windpipe.

"Hey! Hey! Take this wild woman off me. You his personal representative or something?" Jerome Schultz coughed resentfully.

"I tell you, Jerome, this bird's got the greatest act in the business. He'll murder 'em!"

"If he don't," remarked Jerome, "Dracula's Daughter, here, will finish them off." He backed away when Zev glowered at him. "You promised me a Henny Youngman and what do I get? A. . . . This!"

"A little misunderstanding. I told you on the phone this boy is *greater* than Henny."

"He don't look funny to me."

"He's not a comic," soothed Herman. "He's got a specialy."

"All right, all right, he's got a specialty. Who needs a specialty? We need a comic who can M.C. I wouldn't be interested in this guy's act if he could—could—" He pulled an idea from the ceiling. "—could walk on water."

"As a matter of fact," replied Herman, "he does."

"Does what?"

"He walks on water."

"Aw, one of *them* crummy acts. We had a guy done that two years ago. Used big balloon shoes but he always kept falling over and drowning."

"That must have been monotonous," remarked Zev acidly.

"Keep this adder on a leech before I lose my temper," warned Jerome.

"He don't use no balloon shoes," said Herman patiently.

The red-haired man sighed. "Okay, what's the gimmick? Now he's here we gotta use him. He got invisible ropes or sompthin?"

"He don't use no ropes. He don't use nothing. He just walks on the water."

"A magician, huh? But just one trick? Whatya got, some special kina water. I read somewhere about this here heavy water. Is that what you got?"

"Jerome, I'm reiterating. He's got no gimmicks. Show him, Freddy. They got a big goldfish pool in the lobby. Do your stuff. This guy's from misery, he's gotta be shown."

"All right," sighed Fred-

rick, who was getting tired of taking off his clothes.

"Hey, what's the jerk doing?" gasped Jerome as the little man shuffled off his clothes and shoes.

"It's part of the act. C'mon, Freddy." He took the little man by the arm and led him out the dining room door.

"Hey, you *can't*—" said Jerome.

The agent led the scantily clad Fredrick into the busy lobby. A hundred guests, mostly in bathing suits, were milling around a large round pool filled with goldfish. The water was about two feet deep. Even in his shorts Fredrick was unnoticed.

Then he stepped up to the rim of the pool. But this caused little comment because at least once a day some comedian from Queens waded through the pool quacking like a duck.

Fredrick calmly walked on top of the water to the middle of the pool and then stopping he turned to face the wide-mouthed Jerome.

"Look," he said quietly, spreading his arms. "No hands!"

Seventeen women shrieked and four of them fainted. Strong men blanched and the hotel cat, after one horrified look, streaked for the woods and normality.

With a sigh Fredrick walked across the water to the edge of the pool, jumped down and disappeared in the dining room.

Panic was about to descend on Grossman's when Jerome ran to the desk and banged a palm furiously on the starter's bell.

"Folks! Your attention please! It's part of the show!" He banged again on the bell and finally there was silence. "You just seen a little teaser of the world's greatest act. Brought to Grossman's at immense expense. You just seen Corko, the Man Who Walks on Water. He's lighter than Ivory Soap and twice as pure. Consult the bulletin board for Corko's next appearance." With a light of dedication in his eyes, Jerome then ran into the dining room.

Just before dinner the New York papers arrived. The guests, already excited by Fredrick's impromptu exhibition, were whipped into a frenzy by the feature story on page 3 of the *News*. Although the story had been written with tongue in cheek, the Grossmanites, those who had seen the lobby incident and those who had merely been

told, knew they were on the ground floor of a sensation.

That evening every commentator on radio and TV featured The Man Who Walks on Water. When Jerome learned he had a national celebrity on his payroll he decided to dramatize the first public appearance of his star act to the utmost.

Although the guests pleaded for a water-walking show that very night, Jerome wisely announced that the premiere would be held that Saturday night in a gala extravaganza on the lake. This would give him time to arrange for a nation-wide telecast. To appease the guests, however, Fredrick was introduced at the evening show in the dining room. Although no one had the foggiest notion of what he was talking about, his explanations of the art of water-walking were, to borrow an expression from Herman, Boff.

The next morning brought even more startling results from the outside world. Thousands of people claimed to have seen Fredrick walk on the Hudson River the previous Sunday. There were reports that he had been seen walking on 1) The Mississippi River near East St. Louis; 2) Lake Erie; 3) the Ganges, and 4) the pool at the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn. The Russians claimed a 128 year old collective farmer had walked the entire length of the Balalieka River in the Urals. A group of prominent New England scientists and physicists sent a long letter to the New York *Times* stating categorically that Fredrick was a fake. He was termed by them the first of the "Floating saucers."

All this publicity had less effect on Fredrick than the terse telegram he received from Myra. It merely stated: "DON'T EVER COME HOME NO LOVE MYRA."

"Why should it bother you?" asked the annoyed Zev. "You don't want to go back to her, do you?" They were in Zev's room on the fourth floor. He was sitting on a lumpy easy chair.

"Oh, no! I just don't like unpleasant thought about me—" he wiggled his fingers expressively "—floating around."

"Here's something pleasant floating around," she said throwing her arms around him from behind.

Fredrick, until then absorbed in his thoughts, looked at her with mild reproach. "I wish you wouldn't walk around like that."

"Like what?"

"In your . . . whatdoyoucallthems." He waved indefinitely at her brassiere and panties. "It's not right."

"Not right? I'm wearing shoes, aren't I? My father always said, 'Never walk in a hotel room in your bare feet. It's not sanitary'."

"I wasn't referring—"

"Don't you love me?" she asked incredulously.

"Love you? My dear child, I'm old enough to be your father."

"Daddy!" cried Zev leaping into his lap.

"You know," he said, when he'd regained his breath, "you're not at all like *my* children."

"Or Myra either, I'll bet," she said tickling him.

"We've got to practice," he said, trying to dislodge her.

"Dear madcap boy, who needs to practice?"

"Walking on water." With a display of agility he wormed his way out of the chair. "Jerome told me there's a deserted cove on the lake."

Half an hour later Fredrick stood in his shorts on the banks of a tree-sheltered inlet. He had abandoned his usual baggy BVDs for a pair of well fitting Hawaiian shorts which had been bought by Zev in the hotel sport's shop.

"What're you waiting for? The tide to go out?" asked the impatient Zev.

"Shhh! I'm concentrating." Then he suddenly turned and walked onto the lake. "I don't think I even have to concentrate anymore," he remarked with a smile. "I think I'm using an unconscious form of Null A reasoning. Oh, please not again!" he added when he saw the girl strip to her brassiere and panties. "Hey, what're you doing?" His face grew a little alarmed as he saw her approaching the water. He sank in the water up to his knees but by a powerful force of will he came to the surface again.

"Don't be so cute," said Zev irritably.

"I wasn't being cute," he informed her. "It seems fear or surprise breaks my contact." He walked to the shore. "What do you think you're doing?"

"If you can walk on water, so can I!"

"My dear child, my ability comes from the study of years. And I still don't know exactly how I do it."

"You concentrate, that's all. Okay, so I'll concentrate." She furrowed her brows for a minute. "All right, I'm ready.

You go out about ten feet and I'll walk to you."

"This is ridiculous."

"Go ahead!" She pushed him and he stumbled onto the lake. He picked himself up from the water. "I wish you wouldn't do that. It hurts. You know, it feels just like falling on a sidewalk."

"Here I come," she said. She confidently stepped into the lake. She sank to her waist. "Y'know," she said after a moment, "this is going to be harder than I thought." She climbed back to shore. "Hey, I got a good idea." She started unbuckling her brassiere.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I have too many clothes on. That's why I sank!" But this theory proved false when she sank a minute later.

"If you're really interested," said Fredrick who had turned his head like a true gentleman, "I'll give you instruction. I think in time you'd be a very able pupil."

"Oh, Freddy, I really feel so able."

There was a loud bell ringing in the distance.

"Hurry!" cried Fredrick quickly drying his feet. "It's the lunch bell."

"You're so right," sighed the girl. "If we're not careful we won't eat up our two hundred dollars salary."

The next few days Fredrick spent every available moment instructing Zev in the mysteries of Yoga and allied subjects. After the first day her frothy approach to this rigid mental science was replaced by an attitude of serious concentration. For example, after the evening show and a snack of hot pastrami that first night, they retired to Zev's room to study.

Fredrick sat on the floor cross-legged after removing his shirt and began concentrating on his navel.

"I have a better idea," interrupted Zev, revealing her middle. "You observe my navel and I'll observe yours." Fredrick had then threatened to discontinue his instruction and after that she controlled her impish impulses.

One positive result from Zev's association with the little man was the improvement in her complexion. Her skin the previous Sunday had been gray and lifeless. Now it was as clear and rosy as a milkmaid's.

On the first night at Grossman's she had bought a bottle of Old Trapper. When she suggested a party to Fredrick, somewhat to her disap-

pointment he agreed with enthusiasm.

"Aren't you going to try and reform me?" she had asked him.

"Should I?"

"All my other boy friends do."

"My dear child, I'm hardly a boy friend. And in the second place I see no reason to try and make you something you have no intention of becoming. May I have a drink?"

He had then drained a tumblerful with less reaction than if it had been Pepsi Cola.

"I'm very puzzled," he said. "It simply has no effect." Being of a scientific nature he experimented until Old Trapper was only a hollow memory.

The second night, she borrowed money from Herman and the scene was duplicated.

The third night when Fredrick wanted to know where the whiskey was, Zev had told him, with justified bitterness, that his swilling of liquor had made her disgusted with the stuff. And as the week passed, standing on her head drove all thoughts of drinking from her mind.

By Saturday noon Grossman's was a madhouse of activity. Every room had been booked and a hundred tents, at eight dollars a cot, were filled. The Saturday Night Revue had gracefully surrendered its time to Grossman's and fifty technicians were scurrying around setting up television apparatus. Paramount News and Pathe had pooled their resources to build a barge so every step on water could be picked up. The prominent group of New England Scientists and Physicists, which had written to the *Times,* had come in a body to reveal the hoax to the world.

But Zev and Fredrick paid little attention to all this extraneous furor. That morning in their deserted cove Zev had finally succeeded in taking a dozen faltering steps on the water as Fredrick held her hand. She was unable to take a single step without the little man touching her, but her partial success had intoxicated them.

"There's no limit to what we can attain!" exulted the little man as they sneaked in the back of the hotel. "With you to inspire me I know I can completely levitate!"

"Hey, just the guy I wanna see!" An excited Herman buttonholed him on the back stairway. "We're hitting the big time!"

"She just did it too!" cried Fredrick.

"Good for her. Sullivan wants us."

"I said Zev just walked on water too!"

"I have to hold his hand but I can do it!" added the excited girl.

"Zev too! God, what a double! I can see it now—"

"Who's Sullivan?" asked the practical Zev. "The guy who makes heels or the guy who passed the law?"

"Ed—that's what Sullivan. He wants Freddy on his show tomorrow night. They're making a special pool." He waved a sheaf of telegrams. "And I got stupendous offers from Las Vegas, Chicago—all the big night spots. The Shuberts want you for a new version of *Student Prince* with a pool in the orchestra pit. Mike Todd's willing to rewrite *Night in Venice.*"

While Herman panted for breath Fredrick looked through the pile of telegrams. He smiled with genuine pleasure. "What do you know, WQXR wants me on *Other People's Business!*"

"We got to sit down and winnow through the lot. We got to plan your future. Maybe—"

"We're not signing any contracts yet," said Fredrick quietly. "Zev and I have to think things over carefully." He smiled again. "Here's a nice offer from Cal. Tech."

"What're they?" asked Herman. "A subsidiary of M.G.M.?"

"They offer me a full professorship in their Physics Department if I come up to their scholastic requirements. Someone's endowing a new chair in Yoga."

"Oh, them punks. They only offer eight Gs a year. Pikers."

"But how could I be in the Physics Department? It seems conflicting."

"I always wanted to be a full professor's wife," said Zev dreamily.

"You two sound full all right. Drinking in the a.m. is for bums. Now I got a tentative line-up. First you hit the night spots. Then we make a picture at a percentage of the gross. We should clear at least two million the first six months and then . . ." But Herman found he was talking to himself. His two companions, their faces peaceful and distant, had drifted away as if sleep-walking.

By nine o'clock that night Jerome Schultz was in a pleasant frenzy. Although campers from miles around had converged on the Grossman grounds, making it look like an Okie camp of depres-

sion days, State Troopers in their natty, musical-comedy uniforms were bringing order out of chaos. They were assisted by several hundred Boy Scouts from one of the neighboring camps, Wanahahichikuk, who insisted on doing good deeds when they should have been in bed. The newsreel cameras clicked merrily when almost three hundred white-sheeted Apostles of Peter marched up the road singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." The three hundred apostles paid their dollar apiece and occupied the first two rows on the grassy hillside overlooking the dock. Two diving floats had been lashed together and made into an improvised stage for the other acts of the show. Japanese lanterns twinkling the entire length of both docks gave the place a holiday atmosphere.

Even though the carefully planted grass on the hillside was being punished by the huge gathering crowd, Jerome smiled. For in addition to the three hundred and twenty permanent hotel guests, and the hundred and five assorted troopers, Boy Scouts, and television and newsreel technicians, over five thousand admissions were collected.

In Zev's room, an important decision was being made. Although Herman had spent the entire afternoon punching large rhinestones in an athletic supporter, Zev refused to allow Fredrick to wear it.

"This is going to be dignified," insisted the girl. "He goes in plain white shorts or nothing!"

"I wouldn't want to do it in nothing," protested Fredrick mildly.

"You keep out of this, Freddy. No arguments now, Herman."

Herman sighed. "Okay. But the bathrobe is okay, huh?" Jerome had found a gaudy gold-and-purple bathrobe which had been left by Kid Mariposo, who had trained at Grossman's for his unsucessful middleweight championship fight. The letters KID MARIPOSO had been ripped from the back of the robe and CORKO substituted.

"Absolutely not!" cried Zev. "Freddy's not going to be known as anything so stupid. Corko!"

"It's not my name — it's Schultz's!"

"Well, let him use it for himself then."

"But, darling, listen to reason. This is our bread and butter. Give a little."

There was a knock on the door and a yellow envelope

was shoved under the door. Herman picked it up, opened it and read aloud: COME HOME MYRA. "Who the hell is Myra?"

"My wire," said Fredrick.

There was another knock on the door.

"You're on in half an hour!" called a bellboy. "Mr. Schultz says to come down to the dock now."

Fredrick, in an old threadbare beach robe, led the way out of the room. The silent trio was stopped in the lobby by a group of excited men. One of them seized Fredrick by the collar.

"You've got to get us seats. We've come from all over New England and we don't have seats."

"That's a personal problem, gentlemen," interposed Herman trying to pry the little man away.

"I'm Dr. Scheidt of M.I.T.," cried a fat man. "We—"

"Ain't you the monkeys that come here to try and prove my boy is a hoke?"

The fat man glared at Herman. "We're not going to *try*. We will! Walking on water without some physical aid is absolutely impossible. You claim you don't use any type of anti-gravity machine, sir?" he asked, turning to Fredrick.

"I use the greatest machine in the world," stated the little man.

"Aha, I thought you—"

"The mind," concluded Fredrick.

This caused a general outburst from the scientists.

"You gentlemen, naturally, are aware of Null A reasoning?"

"Naturally," exploded Dr. Scheidt. "But I understand you use a form of yoga and—"

"After many years of research I've come to the conclusion," remarked Fredrick, "that Yoga and Null A are closely related. I—"

The scientists were joined this time by the physicists.

"You're on in twenty minutes, Mr. Corko," shouted the nervous bellboy.

"Gentlemen, I'm sorry to conclude our interview. If you wish to discuss the problem further I'll see you after the show. I hope you enjoy the performance." He turned to go.

"But we don't have seats!" shouted Dr. Scheidt. "Dr. Emmons of Harvard forgot to get us reserved tickets." All the scientists and physicists glared at little Dr. Emmons.

"That's perfectly all right, gentlemen," said Fredrick. "I'd be very happy if you'd be

my guests on the dock. I'm sure we can find room for you."

"But, Freddy," protested Herman, "these birds want to crucify you!"

"I'd like them to be as close as possible." He smiled at the unfriendly men. "Perhaps seeing will be believing."

By the time they reached the dock the large audience was already impatiently waiting for the main attraction. The show on the float had been short of sensational. The three tap dancers had fallen into the lake when the float rolled and the comedian became sick in the middle of his second gag.

Four girl singers were now crooning into a microphone as the float bobbled. When Jerome saw Fredrick in his place on the dock he jumped to the microphone before the indefatigible sisters could start another song. "Off the float," he hissed to the girls.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we've come to the big moment." The crowd cheered. Jerome waited dramatically until the four girl singers had been rowed out of sight. "Jerome Schultz wasn't around when the Wright Brothers made their first flight. Otherwise, it might of been a Schultz Production. I've had the greatest acts in show business here at Grossman's, but tonight I'm giving you something greater than the greatest. I'm giving you the greatest-plus man alive. The only man who ever made a sucker out of the law of gravity. This man uses no invisible ropes, no hidden things. What he's going to do is simple. He's going to walk from that dock over to this float. The water in between has been examined by a committee of doctors, lawyers and business men. All they found was water. Right, gentlemen?" He nodded towards a small group of men seated pompously on the dock. They bowed in acknowledgement.

"And so, ladies and gentlemen, Grossman's gives you CORKO, The Man Who Walks on Water! Hit it, boys," he said to the orchestra, which gave a fifteen second version of *Thunder and Lightning*."

A half dozen powerful spotlights hit the area of the dock where Fredrick stood. Calmly he took off his beachrobe. Smiling, he bowed several times and walked to the edge of the dock. A television camera rolled down the dock towards him. On the newsreel barge, two cameras ground out their stories.

There was a deathly calm as he poised to step into the water. Necks crained, eyes strained, breaths were held. Just as Fredrick's right foot moved forward, the three hundred white-sheeted Apostles of Peter jumped to their feet, shouting angrily. They unfurled banners denouncing Fredrick for attempting to emulate the Master. "Sacrilege"! they roared in well-trained unison.

Fredrick, at the roar, lost his balance and fell into the lake head first. It seemed for a moment as though he had fallen on a concrete sidewalk instead of water. His upturned body stuck on top the water for a split second and then plunged out of sight.

The huge crowd was first aghast and then angry. Ugly shouts shattered the peaceful Catskills as Zev dove into the lake and brought the little man back to safety. Only the stalwart state troopers, forming a cordon around the limp body of Fredrick, prevented the little man from being torn to bits by the frustrated, frenzied mob.

Fredrick sat on the hard little cot rubbing his bruised forehead. He was staring sightlessly at the crumpled yellow sheet in his hand. The latest telegram from his wife read: STAY WHERE YOU ARE STOP WILL ARRIVE GROSSMANS 6:30 A.M. BUS STOP BRINGING YOU HOME WHERE YOU BELONG LOVE FROM ALL MYRA.

She has probably decided he'd make millions with his water-walking, thought the little man with surprising lack of bitterness. It was true to character so there was no reason to be bitter.

Fredrick got to his feet slowly and walked to the tiny window. Short as he was, even he had to bend to avoid hitting his head on the bare rafters of Grossman's attic. He looked out over the cliff towards the tiny lake. It was now deserted, but the pale moonlight lit up the hillside still littered with paper bags, garbage and the attendant refuse of a crowd of over five thousand.

Fredrick sighed. What a fool he'd been to allow himself to be used as such a public exhibition. In a way it was lucky it had ended so ridiculously. If he had walked on the water his life would have degenerated into a cheap sideshow. If only he had accepted the offer at Cal. Tech. The calm, professorial life with its mental stimulation would

have made existence tolerable. But now that he had played the buffoon on a coast-to-coast hook-up. . . .

He opened the dusty window and shoved his legs through the narrow aperture. And then taking a last look at the jagged rocks far below he smiled apologetically and leaped into space. His mind was curiously clear as he descended. As he passed Zev's window which was just below his, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the girl sitting cross-legged on her bed regarding her navel. This sight gave him a strangely buoyant feeling.

The girl, looking up in time to see a peering face outside her window, screamed.

Fredrick gave the girl a sad wave of farewell. Suddenly it struck him as quite odd that he had seen so much of the girl. It was approximately four hundred feet from the attic window to the rocks below and at the normal rate of fall he should have arrived at his jagged destination in approximately twelve seconds. However over twelve seconds had already passed since his leap and here he was three hundred and ninety feet from oblivion. Somewhere his calculations, he decided, had gone wrong.

The girl screamed again and ran to her open window.

"Wh— wh— wh— what're you doing there?" she garbled.

"I—ah—" asnwered Fredrick, realizing that after all possible solutions to the problem had failed, only an impossible solution was logical.

"Hang on and I'll pull you in!" cried the frightened girl.

"Hang on? My dear child, I'm hanging on to nothing."

"You mean—"

"It seems," he said with a modest shrug of his shoulders, "that I've achieved true levitation."

"Get in here before you catch a cold," ordered the girl.

Fredrick stepped, or rather floated, in. He tried several experimental steps bouncing gracefully off the floor. In his enthusiasm he bounced too high and cracked his head on the ceiling. He then dropped like a plummet to the bed."

"What were you doing out there in your shorts?" asked the girl suspiciously.

"I—eh—I just felt like experimenting."

"You can't fool me. You tried to commit suicide again, didn't you?"

He started to deny this, but then nodded his head sadly.

"You silly ass!" exploded

the girl. "Just because you fouled up one stinking little show?" She raved at him for almost five minutes.

"I'm sorry."

"Well, you should be." Suddenly she burst into tears. He put his arms around her in comfort. "What kind of a man are you anyway?"

"I didn't think it would mean so much to you," he said in a small voice.

"Mean so much!" she screamed. "If I'd seen you at the bottom of the cliff I'd have jumped after you."

"Aren't you exaggerating?"

Zev slapped his face. "I've never been so insulted in my life." Then she resumed crying.

"How can you possibly love me?" asked the little man. "I'm old enough—"

"You're not old enough to be anything!" retorted the girl angrily. "*I'm* old enough to be *your* mother. Why, I've got more experience in my little finger—"

"Well," sighed Fredrick in resignation, "then I may as well confess that I've been entertaining certain illicit thoughts about you."

"Let's be more entertaining than that!" cried the now elated girl.

"No, no." Fredrick held the girl at arm's length. "Not until I get a divorce from my . . . oh, my!" He suddenly remembered the telegram which he still clutched in his right hand.

Zev read the wire. "Why that old harpy! She wants you back just because she thinks you're going to make a million." Then she smiled. "But now that you're a failure, she'll be glad to get rid of you."

Fredrick shook his head. "No, now she knows I can walk on water and she'll make my life miserable unless I do it on Broadway twice a day."

"Let's just run away and take different names."

He shook his head. "Not very practical."

"Then let's poison the old battleaxe!"

Again he shook his head. "Not very ethical."

"Well, then, let's—"

"Not yet." His brow furrowed in thought. "We'll think of a solution." He smiled. "First we've got to go to Fire Island to get my other books. I think I'm on the verge of something really big. Perhaps I'll even be able to walk through walls."

"Then we'll have no problems," said Zev. "All you'll have to do is walk into any bank at night and help yourself."

"We wouldn't be happy living a dishonest life."

"Speak for yourself."

"That's not the real you talking." His eyes brightened. "I'm sure if I could walk through material objects Cal. Tech. would give me that professorship." Then he looked at her dubiously. "That is, if you wouldn't mind a calm, campus existence."

Zev looked at the little man tenderly. "We wouldn't have to be calm at home, would we," she whispered.

"Not yet," he said firmly getting to his feet. The morning sun just then chinned itself over the horizon and cast a billious yellow glance into the room. "Let's get out of here before Myra arrives. I'll be ready to go in five minutes!" he shouted as he stepped out the window and rose out of sight.

They passed the early morning Grossman bus just as they pulled into Wappan's Falls. Fredrick sank under the dashboard as the big blue bus whizzed by the Cadillac.

As they both sighed with relief there was a terrific explosion under the hood and the Cadillac limped to a stop.

Zev jumped out and opened up the hood. Pieces of Franklin motor lay in a heap.

"I'm afraid we'll have to shoot her," said the girl sadly.

"You mean—"

"I mean," said the girl, dragging out her battered suitcase, "that it's the open road for us. We'll have to take a bus."

"With what?" asked the practical Fredrick. They had $1.98 between them.

"My monthly check isn't due for two weeks," sighed the girl. "Did I tell you I was a remittance girl? I get $45 a week as long as I stay out of Philadelphia."

"I'd stay out of Philadelphia for a lot less," mused Fredrick.

"Well, let's eat," said Zev. "And from now on please let me have the funny lines."

Wappan's Falls was a quaint, pretty little village of pop. 1342. Breakfast was being served in the garden of an old colonial house turned inn.

It was only after they had finished waffles, eggs and sausages that Zev discovered the $1.98 they had pooled had disappeared through a hole in her bag.

"What'll we do?" whispered Fredrick after the waitress had left a bill for $1.75 on the table. "Wash dishes?"

"We'd be here for a week washing that many dishes.

And by then we'd be hungry again and we'd have to wash more dishes. Don't you see we'd never get away? It's bondage. We can't let them do this to two free citizens." She then calmly took off most of her clothes. "Go thou and do likewise," she said as his eyes widened.

"But—"

"We'll float over the garden wall and then make a break for it."

"But you can't float!"

"If you can float, so can I," she said confidently.

"Well. . . ."

"Hurry up before she comes back."

In a moment Zev had tied their clothes in a neat knot. She swung her right arm several times and then flung the pile of clothes over the garden wall.

"I hope I know my own strength," she said smiling. She held out her arm. "Shall we?"

"Well. . . ."

There was a slam of a screen door.

"Hurry, here comes the waitress!" warned the girl.

Fredrick closed his eyes and slowly rose. He stopped at the altitude of one foot for Zev was still rooted firmly to the ground.

"Concentrate!" begged Fredrick who was straining like a captive balloon.

" . . . am!" grunted the girl. "Can't you pull a little harder? I think I—I am!" she cried excitedly as she slowly left the ground. The floating couple rose about ten feet, edged over the wall and then slowly began to descend.

There was a scream on the other side of the wall and a crash of dishes. Zev and Fredrick didn't wait to investigate. Picking up their clothes, Zev dashed quickly to a clump of trees in the village green. Fredrick followed as though sucked into her wake.

Only one person saw the wild race. Mrs. Martha Watkins, prominent local Presbyterian, merely remarked disgustedly to her maltese tomcat, George, "Tourists!"

A few minutes later Zev and Fredrick were arguing in front of an Esso Service Station.

"But we've got to get busfare!" insisted the girl.

"Not by stealing."

"How else can we get the money? Your wife will be coming back this way pretty soon and—"

"But you'll get caught," said Fredrick.

"Not if you do your part. I'll go into the ladies room.

You stand out by the pumps and as soon as I come out of the ladies room you float—just a few feet. While the gas man is looking at you, I'll sneak a few dollars out of the till."

"But—"

"We'll pay him back later," said the girl as she walked into the station office. In a moment she had disappeared into the ladies room. Fredrick's pulse pounded. The wait seemed interminable. Then the door opened and the girl came out of the room.

Fredrick closed his eyes and concentrated. When he opened them again he was only a half inch off the ground. And Zev was being hauled out of the office by an excited attendant.

"Thief! Thief!" shouted the man.

The policeman on traffic duty at a nearby corner ran towards them. Zev made frantic motions to Fredrick to run away but he stood rooted to the spot.

"This dame!" sputtered the gas man. "She tried to hold me up. I caught her with her hand in the till!"

"Okay, lady," growled the fat middle-aged policeman who had previously seen criminals only on *Dragnet*. "You are under arrest."

"There's been a mistake," said Fredrick approaching them.

"Yeah, and she made it," replied the policeman who had been waiting for years to make this retort.

"But she only—"

"You mind your own business, mister," broke in Zev. "C'mon, take me to the cooler, boys."

"But—"

"Yeah, you mind your own business," said the policeman.

"It is my business," insisted Fredrick. "I'm as guilty as she is—"

"What happened?" whispered Zev as they were marched to jail.

"I had my clothes on," explained Fredrick.

"Oh, my God! How stupid can I get!"

"I simply can't understand that aspect of this whole thing, mused the little man. "It doesn't make sense. If I could only get to my books on Fire Island—"

In less than an hour they were standing before Judge Somerset of County Court. Justice was meteoric in Wappan's Falls, and particularly on this day. For the Judge was due to leave on a fishing trip that noon and he had to clear his docket of all cases.

After two bitter trespass-

ing cases and a drunken tramp had been disposed of, the two thieves were told to rise and come forward.

The Judge after hearing their side of the story ordered them held over for District Court.

"When I get back," he sternly promised the two, "I'll see you're punished to the full extent of the law."

"Let's blow this fire-trap," whispered Zev to her partner in crime.

"Huh?" When he saw her taking off her clothes he understood and followed her example.

"What do you two think you're doing?" shouted the astounded Judge. "Sergeant," he ordered, "take them back to their cells We'll add indecent exposure to your other crime!"

"Your honor," said the now scantily clad Zev. "We're taking this case to a higher court."

With this, the two prisoners, one in shorts and the other in panties and brassiere, slowly rose off the floor. When they were about five feet aloft Zev shook her free hand at the Judge. "Hereafter, let this be a warning to you." She leaned over and picked up his gavel.

The two, their hands piously clasped and eyes raised up like Raphael saints, rose to the top of the high-ceilinged room towards a sky-light.

The dozen occupants of the court-room were staring with disbelief at the odd sight.

Zev swung her strong arm and the gavel smashed a hole in the skylight. The two ex-prisoners floated away to freedom.

It was the unfortunate lot of Herbert Morley to be standing in the municipal parking lot behind the court house a few moments later. He had been having his usual post-lunch argument with his wife and was angrily waiting for her return from the supermarket. He glared at the garish movie ad posted on the back of the theatre. Why did they always idealize women, he thought? And they always put them in such ridiculous costumes. It was so damned unrealistic.

As this thought was flickering past his upset mind a pair of shapely legs suddenly dangled over his head and before he could say Bosnia and Herzegovina, a very undressed young lady slid down into his surprised arms.

The vision smiled at Herbert. It was the movie poster come alive. Herbert would have screamed out but the

sound stuck somewhere between his esophagus and lower throat.

"Wh—wh—wh—" he finally managed to say.

"So!" shouted a vindictive female voice that could belong to none but the returning Mrs. Morley. "Now I know why you wouldn't shop with me! Herbert Morley!"

"But I never—" protested the amazed man.

"The idea! Right in the middle of the municipal parking lot."

"This is crazy! I never saw this lady before in my life!"

"Oh, Herbert," gently admonished Zev, "how can you forsake me so easily?" A hand suddenly reached from the heavens and she was drawn upwards as if by a well-rehearsed *Deus ex machina*. "What will I tell little Herbert and littler Herbina?" she sobbed as she was towed out of sight.

Mrs. Morley, screamed and fainted and would have fallen into her husband's arms if he hadn't fainted first. $11.22 worth of groceries now littered the parking lot.

"You shouldn't do things like that," scolded Fredrick when the two had landed in a deserted back yard.

"I was weak," giggled the girl. "Did you see the look on that bird's face when I plopped down?" She ran to a nearby clothesline and pulled off a dress shrieking with huge roses. A dog came dashing out of the back door of the house. It leaped at Zev as the girl rose quickly into the air between a cherry and apple tree. The dog's belligerent growls turned into moans and the startled animal stuck its tail between its legs and headed for a hole under the wide porch.

"Pretty neat, huh?" boasted Zev, modelling her new dress for the disapproving Fredrick several backyards away from the scene of the crime The dress had been originally made for a woman ten inches taller and several feet broader than the slender girl.

"I can't let you go on stealing this way," said Fredrick.

"Okay, I'll take it off if you prefer me the other way," said the agreeable girl.

"No, no! I guess the end justifies the means in this case." She looked up at him cockily. "What do you think of your pupil now? I can levitate all by myself!"

A police whistle blew in the distance and they turned to see their acquaintance the sergeant clumsily climbing over a wooden fence towards

them. "Stop! In the name of the law!" he shouted.

"Let's grab him and take him for a little flight," suggested Zev. "I bet the two of us could lift—"

But before she could finish the sentence she was pulled off the ground by Fredrick as they hedge-hopped to the next street.

"We've got to get some money for bus fare and some clothes for you," said Zev as they peered out of a thick bush.

"Perhaps if we asked someone," suggested Fredrick.

"You mean bum the money? Nah, not in this crummy little town. We'll have to try somewhere—"

The roar of a crowd suddenly split the air.

"They're after us!" whispered the little man.

"Some posse!" Zev pointed to a ball park across the street.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," announced a voice over the public address system, "We come to the pole vault. The winner of this event will represent this district in the coming Olympic tryouts at Randall's Island. In addition the merchants of the county have contributed another valuable gold medal. Will the contestants please report to the field judges near the pole vault pit?"

There was another cheer from the unseen crowd.

Zev pulled Fredrick out of the bushes. "Come on, Freddy."

"Where do you think you're going?"

"You're going to win the district pole vault championship."

"Have you gone mad?" He struggled but she had dragged him across the deserted street.

"Didn't you hear the guy say they were giving the winner a gold medal. You win the medal. We pawn the medal. Get it? Strictly honest."

"Will the contestants report immediately. The event will start in five minutes," rasped the P.A.

"That's the most absurd thing I ever heard."

"Why?"

"Why? I never pole vaulted in my life!"

"Stupid. All you have to do is levitate a little—not too much or it'll look suspicious."

"But I—"

"You just keep quiet. I'll handle it. You look like an athlete in those white trunks. All you need is a number." A tall muscular young man wearing the number 26 and

toting a javelin passed them. "Hey, Jack."

"You calling me?" asked the young man, smiling.

"Yes, come here." The young man loped toward her.

"What can I do for you?"

"Can you tell us where we register for the sansa-fran."

"The what?"

"For the standing sansa-fran." She pulled him towards her. "Lean down so you can hear. I asked if you could tell us where we register for the —Oh, the heck with it, I'll try the ladies room. Thanks." She turned and escorted the puzzled Fredrick away.

"What on earth—" he began.

Zev held out a large number 26 on canvas. "Turn around. You're now 26."

While Zev was registering Fredrick for the event the little man stood meekly at the edge of the vault pit. A tall thin young man peeled himself over the bar at twelve feet. The crowd clapped. One after another half a dozen other athletes thundered down the runway only to knock the bar off.

"No one's going to beat Griffin," muttered one of the athletes who was holding a discus. "He's been doing over fifteen all summer."

"Fredrick Purdy," suddenly announced the loud speaker. "Representing the Poughkeepsie Athletic Club."

Fredrick gulped and stepped forward. He picked up one of the long poles. He had difficulty getting it off the ground.

"Okay, Purdy," growled an officious official. "Let's keep things rolling."

Fredrick, the muscles on his thin legs hopping like grasshoppers stumbled down the dirt runway. There were polite titters from the crowd, for it didn't appear that the little man would even reach the end of the runway. Fredrick slowly stuck the end of the pole into the little trough at the foot of the standards and shot into the air. He cleared the bar by two feet and then floated down towards the sawdust pit. He must have realized his descent was too slow for the last six feet he fell like a drunken duck. As he picked himself out of the sawdust the amazed crowd shouted in amazed disbelief.

"What college did you go to?" asked a surprised young man as the little man slowly hobbled back to the runway.

"I—ah. . . ."

"He went to the University of Hawaii," put in Zev.

"What year?" asked the persistent young man.

"Graduated in '50," said Zev.

"Must have been 1850," remarked one of the disgruntled contestants who had overheard.

"Then you know Charley Osheito. He was in your class."

"Yes, good old Charley," laughed Zev. "No one quite like good old Osheito. Yes, we knew him well."

"No, I'm wrong," said Griffin. "Osheito went to Oregon State."

"Charley always *was* a rolling stone. Rolling-stone Osheito we used to call him. Never knew where he'd turn up next. You'd better pick up your little stick, friend," concluded the girl, pushing the too-curious Griffin. "They're calling you."

All the contestants were eliminated at thirteen feet except Griffin and Fredrick. The crowd, knowing it was seeing the contest of the century, wildly cheered each jump. Finally the bar stood at 15 feet 8 inches, a new world's record.

Griffin tore down the runway, vaulted high into the air and just barely ticked the bar as he slid over. The bar wobbled and fell.

The exhausted young athlete shook his head when the officials asked him if he wanted to try again.

Fredrick now stood wearily at the head of the runway. His arms were like lead weights from carrying the heavy pole. The crowd was hushed as he slowly wobbled down the runway. Just as he put the pole into the trough his numbed hands dropped the long length of bamboo, but the little man shot up and over the cross bar clearing it with five feet to spare.

The crowd went wild as Fredrick floated gracefully to the earth.

"The winner!" screamed the loudspeaker. "And a new world's record at 15 feet 8 inches, Fredrick Purdy of the Poughkeepsie A. C." Before this announcement had left his lips, Zev had seized the gold medal from the chief judge and she and the little man were running away from the congratulating crowd. "Let me repeat, ladies and gentlemen, a new pole vaulting record of 15 feet 8 inches, without a pole. WITHOUT A POLE!" The announcer dropped back in a dead faint.

Just as the flaming orange sun, after a hard, hot day's work, dropped tiredly out of

sight, Zev and Fredrick sneaked on the big blue bus bound for New York. In the interim they had 1) stolen a pair of old faded overalls and a red shirt; 2) frightened a cow into premature birth of her calf, and 3) pawned the gold medal for five dollars at the Wappan Falls Army and Navy store.

Their bus tickets to New York came to $4.90 and they looked hungrily at the fat woman across the aisle who was slowly and monotonously eating a lunch big enough for three. For an hour they rode along the picturesque Storm King Highway. The driver was evidently making up lost time, for they slewed and skidded on the innumerable sharp turns. Zev and Fredrick banged into each other until they were bruised.

"This seat is miserable," complained Zev. "They must have pulled it out of Henry's first Ford. It's lumpier than a bride's first biscuits."

"Why don't you do what I'm doing then?" suggested the little man who was sitting next to the window.

"What are you doing? Using Yogi or something?"

"In a way." He pointed. "Look, I'm not really sitting on the seat."

The astounded girl then saw he was an inch above the seat. "If I took my clothes off I'd be on the ceiling. But this way it works out exactly right."

"Okay," she grunted. "I'll try." She closed her eyes. "No good."

"You're trying too hard. You've got to relax."

They passed a sign which read: "Now Entering Millerville. We Love Our Children."

Zev's face relaxed as she concentrated with closed eyes.

A frightened scream came from the woman across the aisle. Zev opened her eyes to find herself two feet in the air. She quickly dropped back to the seat as the bus slowed to a stop. The fat woman was slumped in a faint over the remnants of her huge lunch.

"Someone wanted to get off here?" asked the sleepy driver, turning around.

Zev pulled at Fredrick's arm. "Yeah, we want to get out."

"Aren't you going to New York?" asked the driver.

"My little boy is car-sick. We'll take the next bus." She pushed the little man out the opened door.

"But the next bus don't come till tomorrow night. Little *boy?*"

"He's one of the Quiz Kids," explained the girl. "It's aged

him." She hopped out of the bus.

As the blue bus slowly pulled away from the two ex-passengers, a surprised face was glued against the rear window. It was Myra, who had been sleeping since she had boarded the outgoing bus at Grossman's. She was so surprised it took her a half a mile to stop the bus again.

But Zev and Fredrick were unaware of the nearby nemesis. "That was a close call," she said. "I must have relaxed too much. I bet that blimp next to us won't forget this trip."

"You've got to be more careful," cautioned Fredrick. "Our gift is a sacred trust and we shouldn't go around frightening people."

"Oh, don't be so stuffy. C'mon, there's a hotel down the road. Let's go get a room."

"Together?"

"Why not?"

"But—"

"Oh, your clothes." She surveyed his rolled up overall trousers and voluminous red shirt. "You do look like someone who lost on Truth and Consequences. And without bags they'd never let us in. They'd think there was something funny going on. Not that there wouldn't be," she added tweaking his right ear. "I have it! I'll register alone, go up to my room and you can levitate in through the open window."

"How'll I tell which is your room?"

"I'll turn the lights on and off four times."

"But I really—"

"Don't be so chicken." They had come to "Ye Pleasante Inne" a rather modern five story brick hotel. "You wait outside and watch the windows." Before he could protest she had skipped up the hotel steps and entered "Ye Pleasante Inne."

Fredrick was very thoughtful as he patiently waited for the agreed-upon signal. Now that he had chosen Zev as his next partner for the rocky trip down the highways and byways of Life, he must do something about her reckless character. He didn't relish the idea of the mother of his next child being hauled into Small Claims Court for getting the week's groceries the light-fingered way. And her attitude towards the awful gift of levitation was too blitheful. The ability to walk on water and defy gravity was one that held certain responsibilities.

A third floor window suddenly blinked four times. Fredrick draped his overalls

and shirt over his arm (for he had undressed while thinking) and slowly rose. As he passed a window on the second floor, he smiled and then stopped. He cautiously peered in and saw an empty hallway. Pushing up the half opened window he carefully climbed in. A waiter's cart holding a covered tray of steaming food stood outside a half-open door. With a deft motion the little man picked up the tray, tiptoed to the window and then flew upwards. In a few seconds he had flown in the open window of Zev's room.

"Food!" cried the girl when she saw the tray. "My hero!" After taking the tray away from him and putting it safely on the bed she kissed him enthusiastically.

"It was nothing," said the little man modestly.

"I didn't know you had it in you."

"There are many things in me you're unaware of," he replied mysteriously.

But the girl was too busy eating her T-bone steak to pay any attention to him. "You should have seen the funny look the clerk gave me when I registered. For an awful minute I thought he was going to ask me to pay in advance. Rare, just like I like it! How did you know? I—"

Imperious knocking on the door interrupted her. "Let me in!" commanded a well-known voice.

"Myra!" sighed Fredrick.

"How in hell did she ever—"

"How does the salmon swim in from the ocean and find its own little stream from among tens of thousands of streams and then swim up that stream and lay her eggs?"

"Let me in or I'll call the house detective!"

"Friend salmon wants to lay her eggs in here," said Zev.

"Well, let her in."

"Let her in? Not till you get out. Go on, float away somewhere."

"I'll give you exactly ten seconds!"

"And she does mean ten seconds," said Fredrick.

Zev had pulled the shirt off the little man's back and was pushing him towards the window. "Hurry up . . . and I do mean *up!*"

"I don't think this is the proper approach. We should face her and—" He was pushed out of the window before he could finish the sentence. Then Zev ran to the door and opened it.

"What's going on here?" demanded the girl.

"May I ask the same?" re-

torted Myra as she pushed her way into the little room.

"I called for ice water, not you."

"Where is he?"

"Where is who?"

"You know who I mean."

"Whom!"

"Who!"

"Aha!" Myra triumphantly pointed to the dinner for two on the bed.

"So?" The girl shrugged. "I have to eat for two."

"Aha!"

"I'm supporting a tapeworm."

"I'll . . . Where is he?" She looked under the bed.

"If you find a man ask him if he's got a friend."

"I know my husband is here. And I'm going to take him home with me!"

"I thought you told him never to darken your you know what again."

Myra snorted. "I've been reading the papers. I know you're trying to cheapen poor Fredrick's talent by commercializing him!"

"Didn't you hear about last night?" asked the girl. "At the big show he—"

"I know what happened. It was just an accident. The poor boy needs someone like me to protect him and—"

"—commercialize him. Well, he's not here. He went on ahead to your cottage on Fire Island to get some books."

"He did not! I saw him get off the bus with you. He must be in here!" She went into the bathroom.

As she disappeared, Fredrick appeared in the open window, upside down.

"We are poor little lambs! Baa, baa, baa!" he sang boisterously, tilting an almost empty bottle of Old Grand-Mother.

Zev waved at him frantically.

"Where is he? I hear him!" cried Myra dashing back into the room.

"He? Him? Who?"

"I heard him singing!"

"That was me," said Zev. "Bahhhh! Bahhhh!—"

"Bah!" finished Fredrick diving into the room headfirst. He careened to avoid hitting the floor and then fell into the arm chair, laughing in a high pitched voice.

Critics of Myra would have been right in pointing out that the determined woman was a tyrant and a good candidate for a broom. But they would also have had to admire her iron composure when her husband sailed into the room like a drunken robin.

"You're coming home with me, Fredrick!" she ordered.

"What in the world were you doing jumping into the room like that?"

Fredrick staggered to his feet and threw his arms around his wife. "Myra! I've got the—" he hiccuped—"the most terrific idea."

"Are you coming home with me or not?"

"Of course I am. And Zev is coming too. Aren't you, doll?"

"Doll?" repeated the puzzled girl.

"Are you insane?" asked the incensed wife.

"You'll grow to love her like I do. She is, in truth—" he stopped again to hiccup. "A living doll."

"What's going on?" asked Zev.

"We'll have a *menage a prois*," he announced with a silly smile. "In English that means—" He whistled. "Watch me, Myra, I'm a bird. We, who are about to fly, salute you." He spread his arms and zoomed crazily to the ceiling. "Off we go, into the wild blue yonder!" he sang raucously.

The flying was too much for Myra; she retreated terrified to the wall. Fredrick suddenly dropped in front of her.

"Take off your clothes, Toots, and take a little spin." He pulled at the frightened woman's right arm. Then he rose several feet, spun like a Catherine Wheel and ended with his feet on the ceiling and his head hanging down. "I'm a bat! No, I'm a tree-toed sloth. I mean a three-sloes toth. I mean. Whoooooop! Quit rocking the boat. Think of the common seaman." He knifed out the open window and the two women could hear retching.

"Oh, my God!" moaned Myra. "What's the matter with him?"

Zev, hiding a smile, sank exhausted into a chair. "Well, thank God you're here to take care of him. You're his wife. You're responsible."

"Me—responsible?"

"The last few days have been utter hell," sighed the girl. "He's been a madman. Drunk from morning to night. Going berserk. You should have seen him in Wappan's Falls today. Took all his clothes off in a restaurant, held up a gas station, got arrested, escaped from the court house by flying nude thru a skylight, stole clothes, frightened women."

"Oh, my God!"

"And that's not the worst!" She leaned closer. "He's a regular satyr!"

"A what?"

"A howling wolf. Why, it's

horrible!" She whispered something to the frantic woman.

"No! Not Fredrick!"

"That's the truth! And the man doesn't know what the word tired is!"

"Batten down the mainsails, my poopdeck is awash!" Fredrick was back, weaving drunkenly over their heads. "My two girls!" he said sentimentally rushing towards Myra.

"No—no!" Myra hid behind Zev.

"I've missed my baby so much!"

Myra suddenly burst into tears. "My poor home! My poor children!"

"You have a duty to your husband," said Zev piously.

"That sot is not my husband" answered Myra with spirit. "They have laws in this country to protect women like me."

"Baby! Come to daddy!"

Myra looked at him with disgust. "If you think I'm going to let you ruin my home you're crazy. I'm getting a divorce!"

There was silence.

"Divorce?" repeated Fredrick in an almost normal voice.

"You heard me! I'm going to my lawyer in the morning."

"Don't let her do it, Freddy," put in Zev. "You have some rights to your children."

"There isn't a court in the country that wouldn't give me custody of the children," said Myra.

Zev sighed. "Well, I guess you lose the children, Freddy."

"I'll fight you from pole to pole," declaimed Fredrick. "I have rights too. All humanity cries out for me. Wooooooooo!"

There was a sharp knock at the door. "Any more noise," announced a prissy male voice, "and I'll have to eject you from the hotel."

"I'll eject that—" started Fredrick.

"Shhhhh!" cried the two women simultaneously.

"I could lick him with one foot on the ground!" Suddenly he began to cry. "You can't leave me, Myra. Who would take care of me?"

No one answered for a minute.

"What's the matter with your lady friend?" asked Myra.

"Oh, no!" said Zev. "One drunk in my family is enough. I'm checking out of here!" She made a move for the door.

"My dear," placated Myra. "You must. You're the only one who could handle him."

"Huh-uh."

"I'll make it worth your while." She dug into her purse and drew out a checkbook. "I'll give you $1000 now and $5000 on the first of every year. For as long as you stay out of New York," added the distraught woman.

"I don't know—" hesitated Zev.

Fredrick secretly kicked the girl's leg.

"All right," she sighed as the other woman frantically wrote a check. "I suppose I'll have to marry him after the divorce comes through."

"It would be better for the children," said Myra nervously watching the girl.

"You mean this is the end, Myra?" hiccuped Fredrick.

"I will tell the children their father died in an accident," announced Myra. Then she walked to the door and opened it. She looked at Zev sympathetically and with a moan quickly left.

Zev and Fredrick remained motionless for a moment. Then the girl leaped into the air with glee, waving the check. She flung her arms around the little man. "Boy, what an act you put on. At first *I* thought you were drunk!" She fell on the bed laughing.

"Act?" Fredrick hiccuped. "Who's acting?" He looked at her intently and advanced slowly but surely. As he passed the light switch he darkened the room.

"Baby!" he growled. . . .

Six years have passed. Zev and Fredrick now live on the West Coast where he is a full professor in Yoga at Cal. Tech. They live very comfortably on his salary and the two checks that come from the east.

Fredrick and Zev have ceased levitating in public, even as classroom examples. However, on some early mornings the woodland animals near their home are amazed to see the professor and his wife gaily skimming over the waters of deserted Lake Myopic with their five-year-old son, Shyam. As Fredrick so often remarks to his devoted wife, "You never know when it'll come in handy for him."

Yes, the Purdy home is the happiest and gayest on the campus. But no liquor is ever served. Zev is as firm as a rock on that subject. **THE END**

The spidery pied pipers

BY ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

When Jim Mason and his wife saw what was in that spaceship they felt a cold wave of fear. Only the children were unafraid, and that made them easy prey. Or was "prey" the right word?

SADAR came bouncing through the back door in a flurry of excitement which she made no effort to conceal. "I hate to mention this," she burst out, "but we've got visitors!"

Jim Mason looked up from the breadboard hookup that he was wiring by carefully fitting each connection into its proper place so that each wire blended into and became a part of a whole through which electrons might flow. In him had been the feeling, and a mild wonder at that feeling, that the extremely sensitive radio receiver which he was building here was being designed and built to resonate to some unknown transmitter. Had human engineers invented radio or had they copied it? If they had copied it, what had been the model they had used?

Mild irritation came up in him as Sadar burst into the workshop. They had come here to this big mountain cabin not only so the kids might have sunshine and fresh air but also for him to have peace of mind and quietness while he completed the testing of this new radio receiver. He discharged the irritation as a sigh. Wherever Sadar was, there was excitement. She seemed to be attracted to excitement, or to attract it to her, he could never quite decide which.

He hastily cast through his mind for possible visitors. The McCulloughs? No, that surly rancher would hardly be visiting people whom he regarded as city slickers. Nor

The mind of the invader reached out to imprison them.

were people from the village below them likely to be visiting in the middle of the week. Perhaps it was some executive from the company using as a handy excuse the alibi that he ought to run up to the mountains and see how their prize engineer was progressing, but actually coming more for the mountain air and Sadar's cooking than anything else. They had the good sense to let him work in peace and in his own way, a program they had discovered made for handsome company profits. He got along well with the executives and would be glad to see them.

"Fine. Bring the visitors in." He smiled at his wife.

She bit her lower lip. Her eyes were wide, with fright pushing them from behind. "I'm afraid I can't bring these visitors in."

His mind was still busy with the details of the circuit he was building on the breadboard. "No? Why not?"

"How do you invite a nonhuman in? Do you say, 'Do come in and my husband will fix you a drink? Would you prefer sweet soda or seltzer? Perhaps you would like a beer? We have beer in the refrigerator.' Or—" Her eyes demanded that he answer this perplexing problem.

"What?" Involuntarily he glanced at the top shelf. In bright colored covers, dozens of magazines were stacked there. In them were stories of far-off worlds, tales of the long-gone past and the far-distant future, stories about races that had evolved on planets farther away than the dimmest star seen on the clearest night. Tales of alien cultures, alien metabolic processes, and alien thinking, with values, motives, and organizational systems differing from the human. Always the human and the alien met, usually in conflict. Mason loved these stories. They provided relaxation and exercise for his imagination. But he never considered them as being anything more than stories, the stuff of nonsense built of bright moonbeams by writers whose imagination could stretch to the limits of the universe but who could not even begin to solve the problem of wiring a simple breadboard.

"That's exactly what I do mean. They're here!" Sadar answered his unspoken question. She pointed an accusing finger at the magazines as if she were holding each author and each editor personally responsible for the appearance of the visitors.

A startled reaction came up in Mason. He got quickly to his feet and the startled reaction grew to sudden fright. It was one thing to read about human and non-human contact, but it was quite another thing to find these non-humans moving in out of the dim wings of the universal stage and parading before the footlights as if they belonged there.

Another thought came up. He looked again at his wife, then quickly looked away, but not quickly enough for her to miss his unspoken meaning.

"No, I'm not out of my mind, yet. I can see very well with my eyes, yet. If you don't believe me, come and look with your own."

This was a challenge he had never yet failed to meet. It was his ability to look at the evidence that had made him a top-flight electronic engineer. But, as he followed his wife from the cabin toward the huge ravine at the rear, in him was the thought that maybe he wasn't so eager to look at the evidence which his wife had called *the visitors*. Maybe he much preferred to have this piece of data remain off-stage, in the dim wings of the universe.

The trouble with anxiety-provoking and perplexing pieces of data was that they simply refused to stay off-stage.

Sadar led him to the edge of the ravine, approaching it by keeping cedars between them and it. The slope below them was steep, then the ravine levelled off in a slow rise of rocky ground where cedars grew. Beyond the ravine, snow-capped mountains climbed into the sky. She pointed downward. "See!" she whispered.

He stared but saw nothing. He was associating to the last story he had read. In that tale the space ship had been eleven stories high and Mason was halfway expecting to see such a ship here in the ravine. He was a little disappointed when he saw nothing, then he discovered the association he was using and erased it. He still saw nothing. Sadar jerked his head to point in a certain direction. "There where the cedars are tallest."

He saw a glint of metal under the green cedars. Limbs had been pulled across the top of the ship. "They've hidden it!" he whispered. And wondered why. The ship was a simple structure. It was round like a ball and was without wings. He had not really expected to see wings. His

wife's fingers dug into his arm. "Do you see it?"

"Yes. Of course."

"I'm so glad. I was afraid—" She sounded much relieved. He recognized then that she had been afraid there would be nothing here and that she would have to face the fact in her own mind that she was hallucinating.

"Sure it's there," he said, to reassure her. Actually he was not more than half convinced himself of the reality of the ship. Involuntarily he took a step forward, found himself jerked backward by his wife's hand.

"Jim, were you actually going down there?"

"I—Well, I was thinking about it." He liked to feel the things he saw.

"Don't you dare!"

"Oh. Well—" He caught a glimpse of one of the visitors. It was sitting on top of the spherical spaceship. A reddish color, with a body about the size of a basketball, it had several legs which covered a span of about three feet. "Spider!" he whispered. He could not detect eyes or other organs of perception but he did not for an instant doubt that this spider possessed a sensory system of some kind, probably an extremely sensitive one.

As he watched, a second spider appeared in a lock that opened on the side and handed something up to the one on top. The two began working there.

"There's a hole in the hull," Mason said. "Probably they collided with a chunk of rock in space. They're repairing the hole. That's why they came here, to repair their ship." He was pleased with this explanation. Refugee aliens were no threat.

"What are we going to do about them?" Sadar, for once, was being practical.

Jim hadn't had time to think about this aspect of the situation. "Why, I—Oh, establish contact. Tell them we're friends."

"How do you tell a spider you're his friend? Do you walk up and offer to shake hands? Do you stand off and send up smoke signals?"

"Well—" The problem of communication hit him, hard.

"And while you're trying to establish contact, what happens? Please, Jim, I'm not trying to be difficult. It's just that we live here. Without any invitation from us, these spiders had practically chosen to build a nest in our back yard. And—" She broke off. From the direction of the big cabin came the screams of

cowboys fleeing from Indians. Only in this case, it was a cowgirl, and Sistie, aged four, was it.

She was dashing toward them as fast as her fat legs could carry her, yelling with glee at every jump. Closely pursuing her, making savage jabs at her with a wooden spear, but being very careful not to touch her little behind, was Junior, aged six. With feathers on his head and painted face, Junior was a whole tribe of redskins.

"You see?" Sadar flung the words over her shoulder as she ran to head the kids off. She caught Sistie and lifted her squealing with happiness high in the air and turned the flight and the pursuit back toward the house without ever letting the kids know what had happened.

In moments such as this, Jim Mason thought his wife was a genius. He would have tried to explain to them that they must stay away from the ravine now. "A big elk there," he would have told them, or given them some other excuse. Actually he had seen an elk in the ravine a week before. Sadar didn't explain. She acted.

As she turned the kids and thus kept them away from the visitors, she also stated the problem to him. Visitors from space were wonderful. But those were his kids!

He took a lingering look at the sphere hidden among the cedars and knew what he was going to do. Sadar and the kids were in front of the cabin when he reached it. He could hear their voices there. As he turned the corner, he was already talking. "Sadar, begin packing. You and the kids are leaving immediately. Oh, hello. I didn't know you were here."

The rancher, McCullough, was standing by the porch. His horse was tied at the hitching post in front. McCullough was thin and grizzled, with hollow cheeks. About him was the air of a kicked dog that is waiting for a safe chance to bite back. A repeating rifle was resting in the crook of his arm.

"Didn't know you were leavin'." The rancher took a look at Jim's face. "Something wrong?"

"No, nothing at all. I just thought it would be best for Sadar and the kids if they—if they went and visited one of Sadar's relatives for a few days." Jim was thinking on his feet. McCullough received the news without interest. Another person received it

with great interest, and didn't like it. Mason felt himself assailed by something wrapping itself around his right leg. Looking down, he saw that this was Junior. Sistie, not understanding what it was all about but wanting to be in the game anyhow, was wrapping herself around his left leg.

"Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! We don't have to leave, do we? You said we would be here all summer. You said so yourself. You absolutely promised."

"Sorry, son."

"But, Daddy—" Jim steeled himself to patience while the wails and the tears died down. Over them, he could see that Sadar had her face set, but he didn't know what this was about. McCullough, apparently hoping he was going to spank the kids, was watching with hopeful interest.

Junior finally gave up. "All right, I'll go if you say so. But first you've got to take me down in the ravine so I can get some more of the pretty rocks."

"Me, too!" Sistie said. The kids loved the bright pebbles to be found in the stream at the bottom of the ravine.

"I'm awfully sorry, son—"

"Why not, Daddy?"

"I—I saw a big bull elk down in the ravine. He might get us."

"Aw—" In his son's wail, Jim recognized that this problem was solved—at least for the moment.

"A bull elk?" McCullough tightened his grip on the rifle. "Hey, now! When'd you see him?"

"Oh, about a week ago." Jim fervidly wished he had Sadar's gift for handling such situations. "Nice of you to come and see us, Mr. McCullough. I'm sorry we're in too much of a rush to be real neighborly." He hunted through his vocabulary for the proper idiom to use to talk to this man but only found bits of it.

"Oh, that's all right." McCullough seemed disappointed because the kids were not going to get spanked. "I just dropped by because I saw something shiny fall in this neighborhood. About sun-up, it was. I thought maybe it might have been an airplane, and I could help out."

Jim knew without quite knowing how he knew it that McCullough's real motive had been in hoping to scavenge the wrecked plane for parts that he might use around his ranch. Had the man seen the spider ship land?

"Hain't seen nothing of it, hev you?"

"No, I haven't. I'm sure no plane fell around here. Nice of you to call, Mr. McCullough—"

"Well, I'll just go take a look through the canyon anyhow. It might be there. Also, I might ketch a glimpse of that big elk. Heh, her!" As he moved toward the path, his laugh was that of a poacher looking for meat out of season.

"Please, no hunting out of season. My company has this property on lease and I'm responsible for it," Mason said. He moved in front of the rancher, his expression unhappy but determined.

"Huh?" McCullough's face tightened.

"Come back when the hunting season opens and I'll go with you."

"I ain't huntin'. I'm looking for an airplane."

"I know that, but my company wouldn't know it." Couldn't the man be stopped in any way? "You see how it is."

"Yeah, I see how it is. I won't forget how it was, either." Turning, he stalked to his horse. Wiping sweat from his face, Jim watched him ride away, then turned to face the still unhappy eyes of his offspring and the worried face of his wife.

"I want to talk to you, Jim. Inside. Junior, you and Sistie stay out here on the porch and play while I talk to daddy."

"Make him let us stay," Junior stated.

They went into his workshop. Sadar carefully closed the door. Jim said, "Look, you are my wife and these are my kids. You take them and get away from here." He felt very masterful as he spoke.

"Look, those are your kids and I am their mother and your wife. I will take them away, if you insist, but I will come back."

Looking at Sadar's face, he didn't feel so masterful. He tried another tack. "No, you can't come back. Suppose something should happen to me—" The instant he spoke, he wished he had kept his mouth shut.

"That would be a splendid solution to their problem, wouldn't it. There is no argument, Jim. We all go or we all stay."

He saw she was not being obstinate but was merely stating the basic fact of her existence. And of his existence too, he suddenly realized. He would never forgive himself if he let anything happen to her or the kids. On the other hand,

he would never forgive himself, and maybe never forgive her either, if he did not himself attempt to make contact with these space spiders.

"Do—do you think there is really any danger?" she asked.

"Sadar, I don't know. I just don't know. I—" He fumbled for words to describe some of the dream stuff inside of him. "I've always sort of figured that any race that was far enough advanced scientifically to have mastered space flight, would also have advanced far enough to have mastered peace. The two of them ought to go together, somehow. But I honestly don't know. And I know only one way for me to find out."

"Then we all stay. But you don't mean you're going to walk right up to that ship."

"Yes." It was not unusual for Sadar to give him in one breath two sentences each of which required a different answer but somehow she always seemed to know what he meant by his answers even when he wasn't sure himself. "Yes, we will all stay." Somehow this seemed the best approximate total solution. "No, I'm not going to walk right up to that ship. I'm going to get my binoculars and my camera and this rifle—" He took the light sporting rifle from the pegs over the door— "and observe the spiders. In the meantime, I want you to keep the kids under observation, either in sight or hearing, every minute." He could hear them playing on the front porch now.

"I do that anyhow," she said indignantly.

"Then do it twice anyhow," he said.

"All right, all right. But—what about the newspapers?"

Very quietly he slipped cartridges into the magazine of the rifle while he considered this problem. "No. That would mean a horde of reporters and photographers, then the public. Perhaps later but not now. One fact prevents it if nothing else. The spiders have *hid* their ship. If thousands of curious humans come around, how will they interpret this?"

"But if they are peaceful—"

"What would you do if forty strangers suddenly walked into your kitchen and tramped up your nice clean floor with their dirty feet while you were trying to get dinner?"

"I'd throw them out. I'd take the broom to them."

"Yet I would consider you a peaceful person. The spiders

might feel the same way you do and they *might* have an awful big broom."

"But the engineers of your own company—"

"Gosh, I hadn't thought about them." He would like to have some of the engineers here. "I see only one objection. If I call them and tell them what we've got, they will rush up here. But suppose the visitors have flown by the time the engineers arrive? When I can't produce the evidence, I'll get sympathy, behind my back. From then on, I'll be poor old Jim Mason; he was a darned good engineer before he blew his stack." He shuddered at the thought and slid a cartridge into the magazine of the rifle.

"Are you going hunting, Daddy?" an eager voice said. "Can I go too?"

Turning, Mason saw his son at the door. He swore under his breath. No matter how carefully he handled the rifle, the kid never failed to know about it. "Some other time son. I'm going way up in the mountains, much too far for you to go this time. Take care of him, will you please, Sadar." Mason fled out the back door to escape the protests of his son.

He discovered that by keeping cedars between them, he could approach within fifty feet of the ship. With the 7/50 binoculars, every detail was clear. He spent until late afternoon observing and photographing both the ship and its occupants. The lookout remained on top of the ship, but so far as Mason could tell, he was unobserved. A thin wail seemed to whisper deep within him sometimes—he actually thought it came from somewhere in the vicinity of his stomach—but since he could never be certain he was actually experiencing it, he dismissed it. So far as he could tell, the ship had been repaired. He wondered what process had been used to repair the hull so smoothly that even with his glasses, he could not detect a seam.

With the ship repaired, why didn't the spiders leave? The question was pointless. There were too many unknown factors in the situation even to approximate a first solution. Perhaps damage had been done to the driving machinery. Perhaps they were waiting for others to arrive.

The thought shocked Mason. An invasion of spiders! He turned such thinking out of his mind. As he watched, the lookout moved and a thin metal rod was thrust upward

from inside the ship. The lookout examined it, then stayed away from it.

"An antennae," Mason thought. He was not surprised. A race that could build a spaceship would have some kind of radio communication though he could not begin to guess the frequencies they would use.

The lock opened and a spider thrust an inquiring body from inside. A conversation took place. Mason could tell it took place though he had no intimation of the communication method employed. He could imagine its content.

Spider in the lock: "What's wrong up there?"

Lookout: "Nothing. What do you think is wrong?"

Lock spider, hesitantly: "I thought maybe the antennae—"

Lookout: "It's perfect. I checked it. To make sure, I'll check again."

While the awed human watched, the lookout carefully examined the antennae. "It's all right. Didn't I tell you?"

Lock spider: "Well—but the set doesn't work."

Lookout: "That's your problem. You're the communications man."

The lock spider hastily withdrew inside. The lookout settled down again, grumpy at the fact that no communications man ever really knew his equipment.

Mason was entranced at what his imagination made of this scene. He wondered again about the antennae. Perhaps it was actually part of a detector system and this was a scout ship sent to explore Earth for metal deposits. If this assumption were true, it might reveal another reason for hiding the ship. Spider thieves from space! Anger came up in Mason, then went away as he recognized both the fact that it was an association to an old story he had once read and also only at best an approximation to a solution. Probably it was a wild approximation at that. He didn't have enough data to draw conclusions, except that he didn't know why these spiders were here, or what they were doing.

Again the lock opened. The lock spider was really agitated. "I found out what's wrong. We blew every transistor in the ship when that pebble hit us."

The lookout was unimpressed. "Put in spares."

"The blasted chunk of rock hit the spare part storage bin."

The lookout came down to

the ground, the lock spider came out, and two more aliens followed. Mason guessed this was the entire crew. They held an agitated council of war. Mason had no idea of the subject under discussion but it was obvious that the spiders were faced with a serious problem. He imagined he could see them suggest solution after solution to each other, only to find each possible solution knocked down by some bit of data that would not fit. In this situation he was inclined to sympathize with them. He knew what this meant.

Then he saw them reach another possible solution, in the muffled sound of a jack rabbit thumping his hind legs on the ground as a warning signal that danger was approaching.

At the thump, the spiders froze. Mason caught a glimpse of the jack rabbit squatting under a cedar. Again the spiders held their quick council of war. Then two of them moved, toward the rabbit.

The jack rabbit is one of the wariest of all wild creatures. He is preyed upon by every fox, every hawk, every owl, and every coyote. In wariness and in speed he has found safety. The faintest stirring of a twig is enough to set him in motion.

This jack rabbit did not get into motion. The spiders did not stir a twig. Nor did they pounce on the rabbit. They stopped ten feet away from the jack. Mason could not see what happened next but when one of the spiders moved into the open directly in front of the jack's eyes, the rabbit did not run. Instead, as the spider returned to the ship, the jack rabbit followed him like a docile dog on a leash.

Hair rose along the back of Mason's head and a cold current of air seemed to travel up his spine as he watched. The jack rabbit followed the spider into the ship. The other three remained outside, waiting. After a few minutes, the jack rabbit hopped out of the lock. Stopping now and then to nibble at a green shoot, he hopped away.

The current of cold air blew down Mason's spine this time.

Again the spiders held their council of war. "Their first approximation to a solution was a failure," Mason thought. They went into action again. The human could not see what they were stalking but it turned to be a fat

badger, which followed the communications spider into the ship as docilely as the jack rabbit had done.

And was shortly ejected to waddle away unalarmed and apparently unharmed.

"Second approximate solution failed!" Mason thought. "But what the devil is the problem that they can hope to solve with a jack rabbit or a badger?"

A whistle sounded up the ravine. It was the big elk, coming down to water in the late afternoon. The elk didn't get to water. As they had caught the jack rabbit and the badger, the spiders caught the elk. He was too big to go into the ship, but he stood like a Santa Claus reindeer outside it while the spiders swarmed all over him. The antlers seemed of great interest to them. They strung wires from the ship to the elk. The communications spider rushed inside the craft. He was gone a few minutes, then he rushed out again, jerked the wires from the elk, threw them on the ground, and jumped on them in a paroxysm of anger.

In that spectacle, Jim Mason had no trouble at all in recognizing a frustrated engineer who had just been confronted with a third unsatisfactory solution.

The elk, unalarmed, sauntered out of sight.

Then the spiders located something else, and started their stalk again. Mason could not see what they were stalking until they had caught it. Then he saw it, docilely following a spider up the slope. Junior.

The youngster had escaped from his mother and came looking for him.

Toiling patiently after her leader, who was following a spider Pied Piper, was Sistie.

Mason started to scream but the sound froze in his mouth. He flung the rifle to his shoulder. And caught this motion. He could not fire without endangering the children. Also, the spiders had not harmed the jack rabbit, the badger, or the elk. Why should they start with his kids?

Junior crawled into the ship. As he watched, Jim Mason learned fully and finally, the meaning of agony. Sistie started into the lock.

Crack!

Down the ravine, a rifle spat fire and lead. A scream echoed it. On three feet, the big elk raced up the canyon. The unseen rifle pumped bullets around the fleeing animal.

The spiders heard the crack of the rifle, saw the wounded animal fleeing. The last one gave Sistie a hasty shove into the ship, then jumped inside. The lock closed.

Whooooooooom!

The ship scattered the cedar boughs that had been used to conceal it and leaped into the sky. It was out of sight almost before Mason realized what was happening.

He flung the rifle to his shoulder then, looking for McCullough. If he could have gotten the rancher within his sights, he would have killed the man. Without the shots at the elk there had been a chance that his kids would have been ejected unharmed from the ship. But McCullough was not in sight.

Mason dropped the rifle. The surge of emotional pressures and their attendant energy mobilizations was so great that he went to the ground too, in shock. In that moment he cursed all the McCulloughs who had ever existed, and all of the creatures from space, and himself too, for letting such things happen. After that, the sobs began. He was still sobbing when Sadar found him. His first impulse was to blame her too, for letting the kids out of her sight even for an instant, but she sobbed out that a company executive had arrived and she had been talking to him and had not noticed that the kids were out of sight. The executive himself was with her, awkwardly shifting from one foot to the other, wondering what he had done wrong. Then who was to blame?

Later, in the workshop, Mason cuddled the bottle to him and tried to study the breadboard hookup on which he had worked this morning with so much interest. It was hard to see. The tears that kept forming in his eyes interfered with clear vision. Sitting across from him, Sadar was crying too. The executive was down in the village organizing a search for the missing children and raising hell with the state police for letting such things happen.

All that was left for them in this moment was to cry out and say good-bye. And tell the eyes not to look around for dear and familiar faces. And tell the ears that this uncomfortable silence must now grow familiar and for them not to listen for sounds of movement or for the hum of voices in it.

Sadar asked, for the hun-

dredth time, "But why did they take the children?"

"The shots presented them with an emergency situation. Their best solution at the moment was to take the kids with them. They solved their emergency situation that way." He thought about the consequences of this action. There were many things here that he did not wish to think about. He preferred to find some approximate solution that had at least a little hope in it. "We can imagine our kids growing up on some alien planet, somewhere off yonder." He waved his hand at the roof to indicate where he meant.

"With spiders for nurses!" Sadar said. "And a spider foster father and mother."

Jim wished he had kept silence. An alarm clock ticked in the kitchen. His ears caught that sound and tried to misinterpret it for him. His ears detested this silence. At this time of the evening there should have been many earnest inquiries about dinner from the kitchen. Only now there was silence.

Off in the darkness outside, a cry sounded. His ears heard that and tried to misinterpret it. He would have none of such misinterpretations. To prove to his ears that they were wrong, he went to the door and opened it.

In the moonlight, they were coming running along the path.

When the hugging and the kissing had been finished for this time, and the kids were stuffing themselves with food, Jim dared to ask questions.

"But where did you go?"

"Big fly ship, Daddy," Sistie answered. "Went widin' in the sky." So far as she was concerned, this answered his question fully and completely, except for one point, which she promptly cleared up too. "Fun, Daddy!"

"Junior—" Jim said.

"I really don't know, Dad. But it sorta seemed as if somewhere way over yonder beyond the sky was a big ship, and that this little one was lost from the big one. The little one used us to talk to the big one, and found out where they were and how to get where they were going." To Junior, this was a complete solution.

It was not quite that for Jim Mason. He rose and went into the workshop and lit his pipe. Later Sadar joined him, and the kids, stuffed now, came with her. She was taking no chances of letting them out of her sight again. The

kids crawled over him while Sadar brooded over questions she wanted to ask.

"But what did they want here, Jim?"

"Nothing. They didn't want to be here at all. They were forced down here with a problem, that of contacting their own kind when their radio equipment had been damaged beyond repair."

"How—I don't see—"

"The solution was simple. They found growing wild on this planet what was probably the most sensitive radio receiving and transmitting equipment they had ever encountered. They used what they found here, and made it work."

"Jim, you must be out of your mind. Radio sets growing wild!"

"It happens all the time. We just don't notice it." He pointed his pipe at the kids. "Watch closely now." Sistie lifted her head and looked up, a bland smile on her face.

"What is it?" Junior said.

"The ship. They're talking to me," Sistie answered.

"How are they?" Junior demanded.

"They're fine. They just called me to tell me that." Sistie caught the eye of her father on her and came running to him, all squeals and happy gurgles. He folded both of them in his arms. He looked disdainfully at the breadboard hookup on which he had been working.

"I can't even take the rifle off its pegs without Junior knowing it. And how did they find me in the ravine?"

"I see," Sadar said, very softly, as if this was not news to her, that she had known it all along. But maybe now she had a new slant on it. "And that means—" A glow appeared on her face.

"What it has always meant, that we are a part of something else that is capable of using a million years of evolution to build, among other things, the finest and most sensitive radio receivers we have yet seen." He hugged the kids to him. Feelings called emotions came up inside of him as the band receiver and transmitter there went into operation, resonating and re-broadcasting to the children. There was deep joy in him, and growing wonder. How did it happen to be this way? He did not know but he had a deep and growing sureness that the something else of which he was a part would not allow to be wasted a million years of patient toil. In that knowledge was—content. **THE END**

THE COURTSHIP OF 53 SHOTL 9G

BY NIALL WILDE

Ballykilljoy has a new song hit these days that goes: "Heaven must be Ireland 'cause my money comes from there." Why? Well, a stranger showed up there recently with this mad machine. . .

NOW you're going to have a real hard time swallowing all this but it's true as sure as my mother bore me while my father eased his suffering with strong porter. So I'll start at the beginning, it being only a bird with a worm that starts at the end.

Down among the green mountains of Connemara there is a hamlet called Ballykilljoy and a hell of a fine name that is for it too. You might discover it on a very large map halfway between Tully Cross and Cashleen, which places are at least two miles off and therefore tantamount to foreign parts.

There are eight low, stone-built, turf-roofed cottages standing in a solid row at one side of a narrow, rutted road that more often than not functions as the bed of a stream. And there is one small, ill-lit shop at the back of which is Paddy Fagan's bar.

Every afternoon the womenfolk yap among the boots, bacon, biscuits and sacks of rusty nails in the front part. Every evening the men drink and conspire with grim eyes and sinister whispers in the back. And outside the rain roars down morning, noon and night, thus proving that one thing Ireland needs is a lid over it.

Paddy Fagan himself is a far wanderer from Belmullet but tolerated because of twenty years' residence, a good pouring-hand and the fact that he helped blow up a troop train back at the time of The Trouble.

She jumped back hastily to avoid the flood of gleaming coins.

All the other inhabitants are of the O'Brien and Rooney clans, they having preserved these patronyms by methods hurriedly but decently consecrated by the Church. As Black Bandon O'Brien occasionally remarked, they'd rather do that or have a fight than have their breakfast.

This Bandon O'Brien is king of the place, him having turf-diggings handed down since the days the Danes got dunked in the Liffey. He is a great ox of a man with ten children and fire in his soul and dirt in his ears.

His wife Bridie is a huge, florid woman possessed of a foghorn voice and the aggressive habit of butting dissenters with her formidable bust during arguments. The only thing that can subdue her is when Bandon threatens her with another and even then, likely as not, it is because she is wishful to be mastered.

Then there is Mulligan Rooney, a dour-faced, lantern-jawed character regarded as a much-traveled man because he has been carted eastward at government expense with monotonous regularity. This is by reason of the fact that he has an incurable penchant for condensing heady vapors in a quiet spot back of the mountains and thereby avoids rendering unto Dublin the things that are Dublin's.

At one end of the hamlet lives Grandma O'Brien, a rheumy-eyed crone who broods over her turf fire, mumbles without cease, tells her beads and makes frequent resort to the bottle which Mulligan Rooney brings her on the second and last Thursdays of each month, this neighborly kindness being his way of balancing the score above against mortal sin below.

Symbolically, perhaps, at the other end is Fianna Rooney, young, tigerish and with a warm glance ready for the burial-club collector who visits every fourth week. This one-sided romance is not objected to by the elders of the kraal because the feller happens to be named O'Brien and will divvy-up a sizable bonus when Grandma becomes the discordant note in the heavenly chorus. Furthermore, it is recognized by one and all that Fianna is hot in her meat, as the saying goes, and cannot be expected to die wondering.

There is also Eugene Rooney, him of the second sight who can smell a revenuer even when disguised as a bishop. And Aulaf O'Brien, brother of Bandon, equally proficient but less potent. And Brenda Rooney who'd have taken the

veil but for the conviction that Ballykilljoy needed her.

And Surplus O'Brien who is the quietest man in Ireland until he gets a skinful of the craythur, after which you can hear him fair way to Iceland. And Timothy Rooney whose mother never knew he was coming or why, she being only tenpence to the shilling.

They are a rum lot, as the Devil said when he looked over the Ten Commandments.

Well, it is a wild evening with the wind coming real powerful across the bogs when a foreigner appears from nowhere at all, enters the bar and flops onto a stool. He holds his head in between his palms and nurses it in the manner of one suffering the aftermath of an argument. The said head is very large.

His dress is queerer than anything seen since the days Mad Harry roamed the hills as a Viking chief in a fireman's helmet and sheepskin rug. His pants have huge floral patterns gaudy enough to burst into flame. He wears metallic slippers and a funny little fur jacket and from the back of his neck dangles a ragged pink strip like a ribbon broken loose from a hanging.

There is deathly silence in the bar while this character sits and clutches his pate and rocks to and fro a piece. Paddy Fagan keeps his trap shut, polishes a glass, slides a couple of crafty looks at what can be seen of the head, secretly attributes its size and condition to some good work with a shillelagh.

After a bit the newcomer lets go, stares at Paddy with large, protruding eyes and says in peculiar tones hard for any man to understand, "In the name of Skads, where am I?"

"You're in me bar," informs Paddy, not caring overmuch for the intrusion. "And what might you be having?"

"I might be having my mating or my number named," says the other, "but, by Skads, I have undercrept both. It was a one-tick evasion."

Naturally the others are interested in this, their sympathies being with anyone on the run from anybody remotely connected with authority. So they relax a little but not too much because even a revenuer isn't above disguising himself as a loony.

"What I meant," persists Paddy, "is what might you be having that is now in a bottle but can be got out for the asking?"

This is a trap into which Dublin's secret service falls with dismal regularity. For among his display Paddy has a bottle of gin with its label removed. It is half-hidden, being so nicely positioned as to be coy but visible. Any snoop nosing for evidence sees this bottle and cannot resist it.

It goes like this: the snoop, pointing, "What's in that?"

Paddy, hesitantly, "Gin."

The snoop, struggling to hide his triumph, "I'll have a slug of that."

Paddy pours it with an air of moody resignation perfected through the years while everyone studies the ceiling. The victim takes a lick, registers acute disappointment which no honest Christian has a right to do when he asks for gin and gets gin. He then realizes that he has given himself away, he has been betrayed. Black Bandon bunches his fist, examines his knuckles curiously. At that point the snoop hurriedly wishes everyone a fine, soft evening and departs.

So when Paddy puts the question all eyes automatically stray toward the gin. But Floral Pants doesn't look at it. He doesn't even look at the other bottles and wet his lips while he makes up his mind. He merely stares at Paddy in a baffled sort of way.

"Voke it twice," he says.

It is outlandish language but Paddy is no slouch and says the same thing differently. "What'll you be having for a drink this cold and sinful night?"

"It will be a hot cafachoc," answers the other. "And your seemliness is enjoyed."

"There now," says Paddy. "I am right out of what you said. Would there be anything else you have a mind for?"

"A vitacitric cordial will serve."

"And it won't serve too," Paddy contradicts. "For the reason that I haven't got it either. Whereas it would be a cruel shame to Ireland if any bar sold stuff with such an unholy name."

"Suggest me," invites the other, blinking.

"A whiskey is the right proper drop for a man with ice in his bowels and a pump in his head," advises Paddy. "I have here the Tullamore Dew and it is a mighty far place where they haven't heard of that."

"Then it is my want," agrees Floral Pants.

So Paddy gets the bottle, flips a stiff one and hands it across. Everyone is still lis-

tening with deaf ears and looking with eyes turned the other way. Floral Pants takes hold of the drink, studies its pale straw color which is more misleading than any road in Connemara. He smells it, bats his big eyes a couple of times, pours it straight down in one throw. Then his eyes come out on stalks and he grips desperately to the counter while invisible powers strive to part him from his breath.

"The forbidden potion!" he gasps after a while. "Processed rocket-fuel modifier, colored and flavored. Twirling stars! It can earn me seven years in the galaxial mines!"

"For what?" demands Paddy, not understanding the half of it.

"For experiencing the mere taste," says the other. "None but expelled Reversionaries would dare—" He breaks off, bats the eyes again, lets go a sudden yell of, "Stink the government!"

"Now there's a fine patriotic sentiment," approves Paddy. "It's a real Irishman you've become with the Tullamore inside of you. That'll be two shillings."

"I am of burning fervor," informs Floral Pants, ignoring the last remark. "It is electrific feeling. And the penalty remains the same for one or six. That is the law-flaw." He lets go a short laugh, pushes the glass across. "Repeat, kindly."

Paddy fills it, says, "Four shillings."

The other sips carefully this time, emits a sigh of great comfort and asks, "These shillings—what are they?"

"Money," growls Paddy, suddenly grim.

"Forgive. I am lackful of knowledge. Money is what?"

"Bejazus, I'll show you so I will," exclaims Paddy, his face darkening. He dips into the old shoebox, slaps a handful of coins onto the counter. "That's money. Have you got any?"

"No," confesses the other, downing the Tullamore before it has time to get back into the bottle. "I am without. I have true regret."

"There is room for plenty more of the same sorrow," announces Paddy, feeling under the counter for the gorse-root with which he has put many a good man flat on his back. "The feller who guzzles the Tullamore and does not pay will leave his hat on the floor, it having become too small to reach down to his ears." With that he lifts the root into plain view. It is twenty inches long, as thick as a wrist and

has a four-pound knob on the end.

The other views this persuader but is not intimidated. He returns his attention to the money, pokes it around with obvious curiosity and inquires, "It is of these that you wish?"

"You have the idea."

"How many of which?"

Impressed by the other's nonchalance, Paddy puts down the root, separates a half-crown from the change and informs, "If you've got a dollop of those you can have any prize off the bottom shelf and may the angels guide your drunken feet."

"Then amity is assured," says Floral Pants with strange confidence. "None of such discs do I possess. But many may be gotten."

"Sure and you'd better be mighty quick with the gottening," advises Paddy. "For I'm telling you meself right now that me patience is going down and me bile coming up."

"Store your concern. A walk of two serks is needed to obtain the discs."

"For why?"

"To reach my tempede."

"There's blarney for you!" remarks Paddy, gazing irefully around the bar. "The man drinks free by making up new words. Maybe he drained Galway dry yesterday and that could be with the slow brains they have in that place." He returns menacing attention to the culprit. "But this being Ballykilljoy you will pay out the pocket or pay with your skull."

"I will pay from the tempede."

"You don't move a step out of me sight until—"

At this point Black Bandon O'Brien chips in. He has been secretly weighing up the stranger and has decided that not even a Dubliner can act that daft. It takes a genuine foreigner to be so polished a lunatic.

"Let's be having no trouble just yet, Paddy," he says, "until after we've seen the money and it isn't there."

"It isn't there now," Paddy points out. "And once he gets through that door there'll be still less of it, him having legs twenty years younger than mine."

"How can there be smaller of nothing?" asks Floral Pants, showing pathetic faith in logic. "The non-existent cannot be negatively extended."

"It can—if there's a law against it," asserts Paddy. "And bad cess to the coward who bends the knee."

Bandon O'Brien stands up, big, wide-shouldered and nigh filling the room. He is about to cash in on the situation with a free drink or a fight and it is not for any man living to deny him the one or the other.

"Give the feller a chance to put a hand on his money," he says to Paddy. "It might be that he's got a fair load of it in a donkey-cart up the road. I'll go with him. If he can't find any he'll need a priest and I'm telling you that myself."

Paddy nods agreement to that, watches the two go out into the darkness and the rain. Then he collects the money from the counter, pours it back into the shoebox, discovers that the half-crown is no longer among those present.

Leaning on the counter he addresses the company with justifiable bitterness. "Two drinks he's had and whipped away me half-crown too. A thief as well as a liar. If he never comes back I'll kill him and may God forgive me after I've done it."

Bandon O'Brien stands in the gloom with rain dripping from his twice-broken nose and inquires, "Now where might you be after making for?"

"The tempede is obverse the mound," informs Floral Pants, pointing through the dark at the hill called Finnegan's Brow. "I arrived randomly, employed the crest for survey, found lights down here. It was an electrific experience."

"And it wouldn't be, as well," says Bandon, "seeing that the same lights are of oil the price of which is something cruel these days and would be easier on the pocket if we had a reasonable man in the Dail Eireann. But nothing will be done," he adds, "until we load our guns and march upon Dublin, which same is being talked about from Skibbereen to Letterkenny. And," he finishes with much menace, "many's the government spy who could go back and tell them that but for the handicap of lying buried at the crossroads."

The other lets this pass, it being jargon to him. Climbing over a stone wall, he starts up the hill at fast pace with Bandon following close enough to give him the back of his hand and the weight of his tongue should he take a mind to it. Bandon is suspicious of this route because no man sober and in his senses will place his donkey-cart over the hill where there is no

road, not even a lane, nothing but a few rocky fields in which repose two pregnant goats, a stack of cut turf and a barrel of Mulligan Rooney's mash.

But he says nothing, just plods close upon the stranger's heels, keeping within easy cracking distance of his skull and thinking that where they're going is as good a place for a quiet murder as any.

They go over the top and down the other side, treading as best they can in the pouring rain and dim light, a couple of times falling headlong over shallow outcrops of rock. Bandon makes use of the solitude to voice several sentiments that would cost him six Our Fathers and six Hail Marys should Father Felim get to hear of them.

Next thing, Floral Pants halts and says, "The tempede."

It is a big parrot-cage with its bars so arranged as to make Bandon go cross-eyed when he looks at it. Some of its bits seem to be there, some not there, some halfway there. It has the manner of hanging indefinitely around, neither of this world or the next, like a soul without sacrament.

"There's a right queer contraption," opines Bandon, staring at it. "Did you bring it from America?"

"It was fabricated in Alb," the other tells him, "in secret and at severe risk. Myself, I made it and, by Skads, it ops goodly. So I undercrept my mating or naming."

"You wouldn't have me be knowing your name, would you?"

"Five Three Shotl Nine G," says Floral Pants.

"Mulligan had a tag like that," Bandon muses, "when they put him back of the wall for a month after he'd taken half the ear off a garda. Breaking stones he was and without a smell of the air or a taste of the real stuff. For why did they put you in?"

"In where?"

"Prison."

"Such is Alb from limit to limit," says Five Three Shotl Nine G, with a trace of bitterness. "A prison. A detentory full of unthinkers and the lobotomised. It is authority deep black like a perpetual cloud. I rive it. I snockoot it with both hands."

So saying, he steps boldly into the parrot-cage, making entry between two bars that might be here or might be someplace else. He bends over a coffin far too small to hold

a respectable corpse, drops the half-crown into it. The coffin hums a low note while he watches half a dozen tiny dials set in its lid.

"Silver was my error-thesis," he says. "It is copper-nickel-antimony. Replication is of similar easement but."

And with that, God be my witness, he pulls a lever and buries Bandon ankle-deep in half-crowns. Up to this moment Bandon has never been stunned, not even when the steel girder fell on his head in Houlihan's garage six years back. But he is stunned now. He stands with his boots sunk in money and says nothing for two minutes, after which he crosses himself and calls upon seventeen saints, not collectively but one at a time and giving each his due reverence.

"What of the quant?" inquires Floral Pants, mistaking this reaction. "Is more to be wished?"

Without waiting for a reply he plays it safe, works the lever and the tide of wealth rises half a leg. Half-crowns gush out the end of the coffin faster than a band of tinkers could grab and make away with them. Bandon dazedly scoops up a dollop of coins in spadelike hands, feels them, bites a couple of them, lets them drop and listens to their heavenly jingling.

"Mother of God!" he says hoarsely. "Now we're all on the pig's back!"

Bending again, he starts loading his pockets as fast as he can go. Floral Pants sees this, correctly concludes that the supply is adequate, comes out the tempede and helps him. Together they fill every pocket to bursting point and there is still enough on the ground to top a couple of buckets.

"A real sin it would be to leave such temptation for any decent Christian," says Bandon, eyeing what's left.

With that he empties all his pockets, pulls off his pants, puts a knot in the bottom of each leg. And him having no underthings the rain beats hard on his hairy backside while he stuffs the pants with half-crowns.

Finally he shoulders the burden and staggers up the hill like a mourner joyfully bearing half a corpse to its wake. He lugs it over the top and down the other side, the stranger traipsing after him and making no untoward remark about the aspect of the foreground.

No women are about this dirty night and Bandon gets to the bar unseen. He marches

in with everything showing, up-ends the pants and carpets the floor with money.

There is a crash as Paddy Fagan drops a pint of porter and treads the broken glass for a better look. Surplus O'Brien falls to his knees and scrabbles around, being desirous of confirming the evidence of his senses. Timothy Rooney sits and grins without belief or disbelief, as is natural for the child of his mother.

"Sacred Heart!" exclaims Paddy. "Some feller has emptied the Hibernian Bank and its customers' mattresses too. Kick the stuff out of sight before the gardai rush in on us."

"It was got legitimate and without me knowing how," says Bandon, pulling on his britches. "Drinks on the house."

"No honest man ever had so much in one lump," opines Mulligan Rooney. "If there's a worse case of barefaced robbery than this one," he adds judiciously, "that one is this."

"It was got legitimate," repeats Bandon. "And more's the pity. Drinks on the house."

"What'll you fellers be having?" asks Paddy, making sure the gorse-root lies where he put it because he can foresee the shape of things to come.

"It will be the prohibited additive," says Floral Pants, pointing to the Tullamore. "I am already more crim than any Reversionary. Let me zude good-feeling in defiance of Alb."

"Pour one for me as well," approves Bandon. "And no spoiling the same with dirty water."

Paddy serves them a good stiff one each, looks inquiringly at the rest of the company. They stare back at him saying nothing in manner that tells him everything. So he slips behind a door and fills their glasses from an unmarked stone jar that Mulligan brought out of the bogs the day before yesterday.

And when everyone has his glass ready in hand Floral Pants stands on a stool and declaims, "Let us drink lib to the detentors of Alb and deadrot to their overseers."

They all pour down their necks and fill up again, after which Bandon takes the stool and says, "From banshees and pookas, from the gardai and taxmen and landlords and bishops, from all terrors of the day or night may a drop of the right stuff protect us."

They drink to that too

while the wind howls through the hills and the rain hammers on the back windows and the smell of peat fires gets whisked up to the hidden stars.

By the time it is ten-thirty Timothy Rooney lets go a couple of those wild laughs that he always produces around full moon. A few minutes later he rolls off his seat and lies flat on the floor while his face goes the same queer color as Liam Daly's did when he was five days dead and getting a bit gamey. This is a sure sign that the party is reaching into its stride.

At eleven o'clock Surplus O'Brien is up on a stool and bellering *The Wild Colonial Boy* in a voice fit to lift all the suffering souls right out of purgatory. In the middle of this Floral Pants whispers to Paddy who takes him out the back door and explains that Connemara is a place where a man squats in a ditch and prays that the fairies won't put a curse upon his naked seat.

By midnight Paddy and Bandon and Floral Pants are the only three left standing and I'm telling you now that they're halfway over to a fall too. So Paddy closes the bar and flops down among the bodies, thanking God that they're all too dead to tear the door off its hinges and throw it through the roof.

Holding together, the pair of survivors go out and wade erratically along a narrow cart-track that leads to Moyle, it taking five miles to cover one and a half by the way they're walking. Floral Pants doesn't know where he's going or why and is long past caring. Finally they reach Moyle which has eleven cottages and therefore is bigger than Ballykilljoy.

At this ungodly hour they stop dripping wet in the middle of the road and Bandon takes in a deep breath and roars, "I'll fight any man named Cassidy."

The cottages are darker than a heretic's hope of salvation and what with the wind and the rain Bandon has to shout it several times before it takes hold. But eventually four of them jerk from their sleep, take off their jackets and come out fast. Floral Pants gets a thumb in his eye before he realizes that this is a hooley, whereupon he yelps an outlandish oath and starts larruping right and left as is proper for a peaceful citizen enjoying a night out.

All would have gone well and somebody been crippled

but for a hearty kick on the shin which bursts Bandon's pocket and sends a shower of half-crowns cascading into the puddles. The Moyle boys are immediately paralyzed by this sight.

"Mother of Mercy!" says one. "The man is rotten with riches and there's Father Felim without a shilling for a shirt to his back."

Bandon hurriedly withdraws a fist that is about to spread the speaker's nose and demands uneasily, "You wouldn't have it in mind to tell him now?"

"Not at all at all," assures the other, knowing victory when he sees it. "But when I'm in the confessional he'll be sure to ask, 'Well, and how did it all finish, Michael?' You wouldn't be wanting me to tell him a few lies and that in the church too, would you?"

"Truth has independence of environment," puts in Floral Pants, coddling a swelling ear. "Therein is my antag with Alb."

Taking no notice, Bandon kicks the half-crowns forward and says in the lordly manner of a British tourist, "There's the money. You can keep it. And a hell of a time you're going to have telling him how you got it or what you did with it."

With that tactical masterstroke he walks away, Floral Pants following. They return to Ballykilljoy where Bandon beds the other down on a couple of sacks in the shed with the pig for company.

Outside, the rain keeps coming and the wind maintains its moaning while over the hill the tempede glistens silently in the dark. But within the shed it is dry and warm because the pig snuggles close and brings little wisps of steam from its bedmate's fur jacket.

It is near midday when Floral Pants crawls into the light. He has straw in his hair, a large ear and a fat eye. His head feels like a cold foot in a hot midden and his tongue lies in his mouth like a dead rat.

By this time, of course, the entire place knows about last night's goings-on, the women and children too. A dozen of the kids would have been over Finnegan's Brow and mauling the tempede but for their loving mothers' threats to murder them if they laid a ruinous hand on the source of good money.

Well, when Floral Pants emerges looking like one unwanted by heaven or hell everybody is waiting for him.

Bandon O'Brien makes him gargle two cups of water and spit them over the wall, then dunks his head six times in a bucket of the same stuff. This makes the visitor slightly more glad to be alive and he allows himself to be led inside where Bridie plants before him a big bowl of praties and a wad of butter.

He looks at this load with ill-concealed revulsion, pokes it away and takes from a pocket a tiny bottle of pills three of which he swallows.

"There now," says Bridie, trying to put motherly concern into her natural bellow. "Is it a sick man you are?"

"I am surged," assures Floral Pants, shoving the bowl farther. "To add is hampersome."

"A right terrible thing this is," she storms, turning upon Bandon. "A far stranger comes starving and you fill him full of the booze. Bad luck it was for him to meet up with the biggest blackguard in the west for not a bite does he get until first Paddy's bar is—"

"Hold your tongue," growls Bandon.

"Is it me you're telling when you can't keep your own mouth shut so long as there's a full bottle around? I'm here with the children, God save their poor little souls, while their sinful father—"

"I told you to hold your tongue," bawls Bandon, going red in the face.

"Listen to him," Bridie invites Floral Pants. "Mad with the drink. That's what money does for him. Not a thought for the children. Not a coat for their backs or a crust for their bellies. Just the drink. He'll never get any at his wake so he's having it now."

"And it's beside my box you'll drink Mulligan dry with your sorrow," shouts Bandon. "Except that there's not going to be any wake, I'll see to that. It'll be held over my dead body and I'm telling you that myself."

"Is more of this money to be wished?" inquires Floral Pants with the manner of one striving to make peace in the midst of incomprehensible war. "Much may be gotten in a walk of two serks."

"Heaven bless you for a decent, kindly man," says Bridie, breathing heavily and twitching her fingers. "There is a couple of good, strong sacks under the pig. You can take them with somebody who won't lead you straight back to the bar."

"I'm going with him," declares Bandon.

"That you are not," yells Bridie. "We can do better with the money than give it to a spalpeen from Belmullet and it's not only me who can tell you that."

"Isn't it now?" says Bandon, glowering real cruel. "Who else is going to tell me before he's flat on his back?"

"Father Felim," retorts Bridie with noisy triumph. "And it's himself I'll be down the road to get the moment you're over the wall and across the field."

"There's a right dirty trick for a yapping woman to play," says Bandon with great bitterness. "This money is no business of his, seeing it's got legitimate. I—"

"Shut up!" snaps Bridie, knowing she's got him neck-deep in the bog. She looks over the ten kids, trying to decide which can be trusted to carry the most and confess to the least.

And at that moment Fianna Rooney slinks in.

The effect on Floral Pants is what he calls electrific. He stands up with his big eyes bulging while she bulges back at him with what God has given her.

"Dreamous!" he declaims hoarsely. "Extra-magitive. A 7D mating-type and unnamed. By Skads, I am pashed!"

Fianna combs back her thick red hair with long, slender fingers and lets her green eyes give him far more than the burial-club collector ever got, the stake being considerably higher. Floral Pants has an ecstatic shiver that starts at his heels and finishes on the bit of ribbon dangling from the back of his neck.

It doesn't take Bridie five seconds to absorb these mutual reactions and perceive the chance to establish a gold mine in a local bed, with the blessing of the church, of course. Upon the swift grasping of such opportunities is Ireland's prosperity well founded.

So she shoves a sweet smile into her beefy face and says, "Sure and it's the angels must have sent you, Fianna Rooney. The gentleman here wants someone to help him bring his money from over the hill. And it would be at this time that Bandon has a strain in his back."

Holy Mary intercede for such a terrible liar, thinks Bandon, but he does not contradict because he now sees which way the wind is blowing and is hopeful that for many years to come it will blow steadily across the bar.

"It isn't a donkey I am to carry loads around," says Fianna tantalizingly. She sweeps the hair again, breathes in deep to emphasize her good points, lets a hand rest on a very visible hip and dares Floral Pants out the corners of her eyes.

Floral Pants holds on tight to the end of the table and pants like the oldest horse in the Galway Blazers. "A 7D beyond Alb," he repeats, sort of stupefied. "I am free and I am pashed."

"You wouldn't be after refusing a far stranger a Christian hand, would you?" asks Bridie severely.

"Well, not if you put it that way," agrees Fianna, finding ethical support for her maidenly eagerness.

So she moves with shapely grace toward the door and throws Floral Pants the modest come-on to which he responds with that shameless alacrity peculiar to foreigners. Together they go out, climb the wall and start up the hill.

Bandon says moodily, "I'm thinking it won't work out. I'm thinking that with all the money he can find he'll be taking her away to the big city. And with all the heat she's got she'll be killing him before he's got the taste of it. Then she'll live on his money and forget the ould country."

"God forgive you for your evil thoughts," answers Bridie. "Which same I've become hardened to since that first time you blarneyed me into going behind a turf-stack."

Floral Pants heads the way up the hill because he knows where he is going and moreover Fianna is wishful to let any witnesses in the hamlet see her following with virtuous reluctance. But once they are over the top Fianna takes the lead and with a sort of absent-minded innocence lets the stranger observe the movements of her limbs and the lithe twistings of her body as she scrambles over walls and runs down fields.

By the time they reach the tempede Floral Pants is no longer interested in money. The rain has ceased for a short while, the sun is shining, the whole world is bright green except for Fianna's hair which he wants to hold in thick coils while he gnaws the ends of same.

He sits on a rock and goggles at her and says, "I have not my locus. The tempede suffers coarse adjustment and I undercrept snatchfully. I over-receded by uncertain margin." Then he breathes

heavily and adds, "But now I wonder."

"Where is the money?" asks Fianna, staring at the parrot-cage and seeing no lucre.

"The replicator makes much to sample," he informs. "For so long as power remains." Then he smacks a hand to his forehead. "I am without sample. The drink-place has every one."

Fianna has been listening intelligently despite that it's just a lot of gabble. But she grasps this last bit, manages to find a sixpence and a shilling, gives them to him. He is not much interested until it occurs to him that a demonstration might impress her greatly in his favor, which is true enough she being a Rooney that never let a penny go without a friend.

Entering the tempede, he drops the shilling into the coffin, reads its dials, makes a couple of adjustments, pulls the lever and holds it over quite a piece. Shillings rush out the end of the coffin faster than sins can be forgiven by all the priests in Christendom. They mount up until there is half a ton of them, by which time Fianna has the expression of one willing to imperil her mortal soul for the pleasure of buying fresh grace.

Noting this, Floral Pants doubles the seduction by dumping a load of sixpences on top of the shillings. Then he comes back, squats on the rock beside Fianna, takes one of her hands in his and strokes it tenderly. She doesn't stop him because this is very reasonable play considering the size of the stake on the landscape.

They sit there for four solid hours while the sun climbs high and starts sinking again and the money shines like the Devil's eyes when he encounters a lonely virgin. And the pregnant goats graze peacefully nearby while Floral Pants pours out his story in words that Fianna can no more than half understand.

He tells her that he was a genetically created research worker at the Temporal Institute in Alb, that he has made a dozen tempedes in secret and at terrible risk. None of them worked until this one which functioned in sufficient time to permit a one-tick evasion.

Therefore he was able to escape his fate at the moment it became due. Alb, he explains, has decided on a quota of 5T, 14DS and 7L types for the next influx. As a 7D himself he is thus required to mate with a 7R and get busy

producing the requisite number of 7L offspring that would result from such a union.

This marriage, he goes on, is compulsory and must be consummated in the presence of the Breeding Masters. A refusal brings choice of two fates: the rebel may accept food and shelter while working all his life in the galaxial mines or seek his own on a violent, untamed world as an expelled Reversionary.

Finally, he tells her that the 7R partner chosen for him has pin-eyes, buck teeth and a high-pitched laugh like the scream of a sea-bird. It would be, he asserts, physically impossible to perform his duty to the state even in privacy, complete darkness and while drunk, much less before an audience of bureaucrats.

Naturally although she understands little of this Fianna listens with the warm sympathy one gives to any man with more moo than a herd of cows. So when he suggests that he can take her away from all this by the same means as he got away from all that she is coy and shocked but willing to suffer further temptation.

"I am 7D and you are 7D," he states, like Father Felim voicing a theological clincher. "We are of basic unity. A new world is ours for the seeking. Yours and mine. You will find it and have electrific feeling."

"My Uncle Seamus emigrated forty years back and did right well for himself," informs Fianna. "Sure, he has a government job for the rest of his days, God bless him." She thinks a bit and adds, "In a big city called Ossining."

"I am lackful of knowledge of it," says Floral Pants. He stands up, gestures invitingly toward the tempede. "With slow op at less haste and better control I can show other worlds after this one but before Alb. Thesically fifty, a hundred or two hundred orbits hence would be ideal."

"You mean you want me to go in that thing?" asks Fianna, gazing doubtfully at the parrot-cage and failing to see how it can be a danger to any good woman. After all, it is just a queer arrangement of bars on a metal platform and nothing like one of those big, shiny American cars that sometimes stop to ask the way and let one thing lead to another.

"Truly," agrees Floral Pants, entering it himself and posing before a tiny switchboard. "The slow op will avoid tense-sickness and racking head. Come in and hold my

arm for stability. I will op and you can look."

There are no wheels, no propellors, no wings and it's obvious that the contraption cannot move an inch despite that somehow it got there in the first place. These facts encourage Fianna to believe that he cannot make away with her against her will. It is not that she fears abduction but rather that she's wishful to have control of it.

"Then I'll be with you," she says, lifting her skirts a little and stepping forward. "But don't let this be long because there's the money to be carried away."

Now I'll tell you: while all this has been going on Bandon and Bridie have been developing the fidgets with the passing of time and not a sack or a shilling in sight. And after four hours everyone is in the O'Brien cottage talking about the matter and trying to decide whether or not to go over the hill at risk of spoiling the whole affair, as seems likely.

"Four hours," opines Bandon, speaking from experience, "is enough for any man even with a fair fight on his hands. By that time he should be satisfied and have a mighty thirst upon him enough to bring him twenty miles for a bottle."

"Or it could be the other way around," suggests Eugene Rooney, knowing his own tribe. "Fianna may have chased him to Galway, her having waited too long."

Brenda Rooney, who is the local paragon of piety, sniffs through her thin nose and tells them, "This sin will be upon all of you. God in heaven knows it's no part of mine."

"If I had the legs on me," quavers Grandma O'Brien, leaning on her stick and breathing poteen, "I'd be over there with one hand for the money and the other for her head before she gets away with the lot."

This suggestion that Fianna may be disloyal enough to make off with the total take is sufficiently horrifying to precipitate immediate action. Bandon and Aulaf and Eugene and several others burst out the cottage and race up the hill swearing bloody murder with Timothy Rooney lagging in the rear and grinning like a bookie in a fast train.

Over the top they see the tempede with Floral Pants standing inside and Fianna walking toward it. They slow down to a decent and friendly pace, feeling vastly relieved because they can now perceive

the mountain of coins waiting to be shovelled up. The reason for the delay is now evident, they decide—Fianna has been persuading the foreigner to milk the tempede of all it can give.

They arrive alongside in right good humor and Bandon is just opening his mouth to give Christian greeting when a truly incredible thing happens.

Fianna takes hold of Floral Pants' arm, notices the audience and apparently is about to make a remark. At the same time Floral Pants makes up his mind to brook no interference at this critical stage, twists something on the switchboard and the entire contraption shivers away into nothingness.

For about a second or two, seconds at most, nothing whatever is visible except the great pile of coins. There is a ghastly emptiness that shocks the eyes and the mind. But the onlookers hardly have time for this to register when the tempede come shivering back into plain view.

All this could have well been taken for a devilish trick of the eyesight but for the fact that the two in the cage are no longer alone. They have seven kids with them, big-eyed, red-haired, full of freckles. The kids gawp out and the audience gawps in and both parties are equally dumbfounded.

Furthermore, Floral Pants has become bald and paunchy and has miraculously changed his attire for a silvery jacket and a purple kilt. Fianna is wearing a crimson cape and is twice as fat as any pig.

"So it's here you are still standing after fourteen years like the weeds in Cooney's field," says Fianna, speaking with the strange accents of a long exile. "Doing nothing while I get married and raise a family." She gestures with pride at the kids and everyone notices the flash of large jewels on her fingers.

"Fianna Rooney, if it's yourself I am seeing—" begins Bandon.

She shuts him up and addresses the company. "We've come back to Erin to show the kids and have a fair word with you. Take the money down and put some of it on Timothy because he hasn't got long and it's lucky he is not to know or understand. And," she goes on, "I'll give you the name of a horse that the host of saints will push to victory and every shilling you've got on him will make a pound."

They are so dazed with

(Concluded on page 130)

the vicar of skeleton cove

BY IVAR JORGENSEN

Men have died for a woman's love. But the Vicar stayed alive for centuries, determined to cheat death until he possessed the girl who hated him!

IT WAS at the time of Spain's golden age. The new world had been discovered and had proven to be a vast treasure trove, ripe for the looting. A good time for Spain, with her sea strength at its apex. Thus could her galleons ply back and forth unchallenged, bringing gold and silver—wealth undreamed of before the opening of the new world—to glut the royal treasury and fill the coffers of Philip of Spain.

Unchallenged? Not exactly. For there were the lean, hungry dogs of England forever snapping at the flanks of the fat Spanish ships; moving in like thin black shadows to seize a sluggish galleon by the throat and shake the treasure from its bowels.

There was Kidd, and Captain England, and John Davis, and the rest of the freebooter clan; gentlemen among them, mayhap, but mostly swine and all with a stomach for slaughter and a greed for gold.

But none there was to compare with Henry Cowper—The Vicar. This barber-pole of a madman—seven feet lacking an inch or two—was the one who gave an even fouler name to a black profession. And luckless indeed were the ships that strayed down wind of his grim-hulled schooner, *The Vampire*. A hell-ship she was, if ever one sailed the Main; with a crew of prize devils dredged up from the scum-pots of Kingston, Port Royal, Savannah, and all the festering disease spots of the Islands.

Horror chilled her blood as the evil apparition came toward her. 93

Down would come the *Vampire,* like a breath out of hell itself, upon a wallowing Spanish treasure ship; while every man aboard the doomed vessel consigned his soul to God and waited for the dread identification—*"Heaven help us if it's the Vicar!"*

A rare one, this mad privateer who swooped now and again out of Skeleton Cove to turn the sea red around the hull of a luckless vessel. For here was a man who killed for joy and blasphemed the while by wearing the clothing of a man of God. All in black, he dressed, with the low-crowned hat of the cleric and a reversed collar stained with the blood of his victims. The Vicar of Skeleton Cove. But a symbol of evil rather than good.

Where Henry Cowper moved, hell followed along; for—as it was once said by an old sea dog in Barbados—"When the Vicar boards a ship, there's screams of agony and blood awash by the buckets, and happy is them that dies from a single thrust or is lucky enough to be drowned."

It was in Kingston, one fine sunny morning, that the Vicar first set eyes on Maria Consuegra y Castilla, the daughter of an emissary of King Philip himself. She was nineteen at the time, as beautiful and well formed a girl as ever came out of old Spain. With her night-black hair, rich creamy skin, flashing black eyes, Maria had caused yearning to rise in the hearts of many men.

But when Henry Cowper saw her, his feeling was far stronger than mere yearning. He was sitting in a tavern surrounded by a score of his black-legs when she rode past in the Governor's carriage. The Vicar's eyes blazed up instantly. "I would have that wench," he said. "She'll be my prize."

Billy Swain, the Vicar's first mate looked up from his grog in speechless amazement. "That—that Consuegra female? Man, you're daft. May as well want the Queen herself as—"

A vicious back-handed swipe from the Vicar, knocked Billy to the floor. "I'll have her, you slab-sided poltroon! Henry Cowper *could* have the Queen, if he wanted her. And you'd best remember that!"

As the Vicar stared out the window, Billy Swain got slowly to his feet and rubbed the sting from his face. He looked at the Vicar and his hand

froze midway in the gesture. Billy's eyes widened. He had seen the Vicar in all moods—in the savagery of slaughter—in the calmer cruelty and sadism of torture—but never had he seen such a fixed and terrible look on the face of the tall, lean Englishman.

"I'll have her," the Vicar muttered. "Though all the Spanish navy stand in the way—though all hell itself bar me—*I'll have her.*"

And an odd chill ran down Billy Swain's spine.

Soon, the barmaid brought another round of grog. As she set a mug before the Vicar, he looked up suddenly as though his mind and heart—if indeed he had a heart—had been far away and had now returned. His eyes blazed and he swept the mug across the room with a backhand lash. "I want none of that vile wash! And none of your presence!"

The barmaid cringed back in terror. "If I offend ye, milord—"

"All women offend after sight of her. Out of the room or I'll slash your throat!"

The barmaid fled and the Vicar turned in rage upon the group he'd been drinking with—his own men. "Away, ye blasted scum! Out of my sight! Back to the ship, each lousy dog of ye, and await my pleasure! Man the craft and be ready to sail at instant's notice!"

The men, abashed and surprised by this sudden, unexplained rage, cringed back also. "And when will that be, Captain?" Billy had the courage to ask.

The Vicar snatched a mug and flung it at Billy. The latter dodged in time to miss a broken skull. "At my pleasure!" roared the Vicar. "And ye'd best be ready or I'll fling loose with a cutlass and there'll be head rolling and you may take that as Gospel!"

The men sneaked away like whipped dogs and the Vicar turned hot eyes through the window to where the carriage in which Maria Consuegra rode, was just vanishing around a turn. "I'll have her bound hand and foot before me," the Vicar muttered, "or consign my soul to deepest hell, I vow."

As though it were not already so consigned.

As the carriage had passed, Miguel Consuegra, Maria's father and also the King's Emissary, had glanced with distaste at the inn and had spoken to the Governor beside whom he sat. "I understand that place is sometimes alive

with cutthroats." He spoke sternly.

The Governor glanced up quickly, with some uneasiness. "It is true that at times—"

"These pirates—these enemies of the King are allowed to come here unmolested?"

The Governor reddened. "To understand the facts, one must be aware of the whole situation, your Excellency. We live in dangerous times, here in New Spain, and one must be expedient—"

While Maria, not following the conversation allowed her eyes to roam among the strange new sights, her father said, "I suggest you explain in less roundabout terms!"

"In plain words, your Excellency, these pirates are powerful men and to a great extent, we who live here—we who govern in the glorious name of King Philip—are somewhat removed from the core of Spanish power. While we make no concessions to these madmen on the sea, a certain—ah, discretion is necessary on land—in the ports. A sort of—ah, gentlemen's agreement as it were. So long as they are allowed to come and go—to a small extent, that is—they do not exert their treacherous depredation ashore, but confine their deviltry to the open sea where we are better able to cope with them."

"It appears to me that we have not been very able upon the sea either."

"We do our best," the Governor said meekly. "But we need more Spanish ship-of-the-line to protect us on both land and sea."

"The king shall certainly hear of this," Miguel Consuegra said. "It is good I came to look this situation over."

"When does your Excellency plan to return to Spain?" the Governor asked. And he could have been pardoned if there seemed to be a bit of eagerness in his voice.

"With the tide, two days hence."

But eager as he was to have His Majesty's representative leave before delving too deeply into the situation, the Governor was forced to say, "I would recommend a delay of two more days, your Excellency. On Friday, three ships will return from a westward chase and will be at your service as an escort."

Maria, riding between the two men, felt a sudden chill. She turned and her eyes—as though drawn by a magnet—fell upon a lean, vicious-looking cleric who rode in a carriage just behind. His eyes

locked with hers, and she saw such cruelty and blackness of soul deep within them, that she shuddered.

Her father turned to her instantly. "Are you cold, my dear?"

"No—no, of course not," Maria said, and turned her eyes forward. But she had lied. It was as if a cold wind had come out of the hot morning sky to chill her to the bone.

Her father was again engaged with the Governor. "I beg to remind you that the ship upon which we embark —*The Lord of the Indies* is a ship of the line. Twenty-six guns and the pick of his Majesty's fighting men are to be found on her decks. Do you dare intimate that we should fear any of the skulking jackals that snap at the heels of our fleet?"

"Of course not, your Excellency—of course not."

"Besides," Miguel Consuegra added, darkly, "I must make some haste. I am sure his Majesty will listen with interest to some of the things I have to report."

The Governor hid the start. This was his first intimation that Consuegra had not found things as the King would have liked. Consuegra had been close-mouthed. Fast thinking was required to meet this new knowledge and the Governor turned also to look in the direction Maria had previously glanced. And the Governor saw the dread figure of Henry Cowper sitting stiff and alert in the carriage behind.

Hope came to him suddenly. If the *Lord of the Indies* failed to return to Spain . . .

Carlos de Ortega, captain of the *Lord of the Indies*, stood on the quarter deck of his vessel and raised a deferential hand to his brow. He smiled and said, "Welcome aboard, your Excellency."

Miguel Consuegra acknowledged the greeting with a curt nod. "We have a fair wind."

"A fair wind indeed, and it bodes a swift and successful voyage back to Spain. Your charming daughter and her *duenna* have been located in my own quarters, aft. It is the best we have to offer and I trust the voyage will not be too onerous for her."

"We appreciate your courtesy. Our only desire is a swift return to the King's court."

"It will be swift and safe," de Ortega assured.

"No danger from pirates?" Consuegra asked sharply.

The other laughed with derision. "There is no pirate

craft afloat that would dare face our guns. None of that scum wishes a sure trip to the other world. Too much retribution lies waiting there."

"You understand my concern, of course, Captain. We carry something more precious to me than all the gold plate in the Spanish treasury."

"I understand, your Excellency. And let me assure you that your daughter is as safe as she would be in the King's palace."

"Thank you. And now, will you show me to my quarters?"

Henry Cowper stood beside the Governor's desk and asked, "What did ye want to see me about?" He used no title, spoke no term of respect; only contempt radiated from his words and his manner.

The Governor ignored the unspoken insult. "It appears that we may do each other some good, Cowper."

"I've no particular stomach for it, but I'll listen."

"The *Lord of the Indies* sails two days hence."

"So—?"

"It is my wish that it does not reach Spain."

"Does it carry a treasure? If so, I may be able to accommodate ye."

"She carries no treasure, but I'll pay you well to sink her and bring me a certain property which will be aboard."

The Vicar sneered. "Twenty-six guns. A ship of the line. Only a hullful of gold would pay for the risk. Do ye have that much gold to pay with?"

"Well, hardly, but there are other favors I could do—"

"What is this property ye wish delivered?"

"A girl. I would have all souls aboard destroyed except one Maria Consuegra y Castilla. I'd have the wench for myself."

The Vicar's eyes blazed and the Governor cringed as he leaned forward over the desk. *"That girl will be aboard?"*

"Why, yes. Her father is returning—"

"Ye'll need no gold to pay me," the Vicar said. "And ye'll get your wish. Though she have five hundred guns, I'll put her under the sea."

"That's all very well, but—"

"Ye'll not get the girl, though! She's for me! For me alone!"

The Governor sighed, "Very well, if that's how it must be. But I was going to say that courage is not enough with which to go against a ship like the *Lord*

of the Indies. I have a plan to help you take her."

"I'll need no help."

The Governor stiffened a little. "I insist. There must be no failure here. I will put my plan into action and there is one thing you must agree on."

"What thing is that?"

"You must board her the first night out."

"That, I'd planned. I'll wait not a moment longer than necessary."

"Then leave the rest to me."

And the Vicar strode, hot-eyed from the room.

The *Lord of the Indies* went out on the morning tide, brave and beautiful under her bright banners. The Governor breathed a sigh of relief and smiled as the last echo of his gunfire salute to the King's Emissary died. Then his smile softened and there was a look of distinct regret in his eyes. A shame that one so beautiful and desirable as Maria Consuegra y Castilla had to fall into the filthy hands of so black a rogue as the Vicar. And strange that the Vicar had been so adamant on this point. The Governor had certainly wanted to insure that delectable bit of femininity for himself. But he had acceded to the Vicar, remembering that, after all, his paramount interest was the sinking of the vessel itself. Its safe arrival in Spain would certainly have sealed his own doom.

For several days now, a strange feeling of uneasiness had encompassed Maria. It had come upon her gently, insidiously — something so vague as to be indefinable—until she had finally been forced to face it squarely. Why should she feel nervous when, during all her lifetime, there had never been any cause for fear? Why this sudden penchant for glancing over her shoulder when never in her life had she been other than resolute and without the slightest touch of timidity?

There was something—some little thing back in recent memory that had started it all. What was this thing? A reality, or an incident in some dream? A dream would be vague and tenuous enough to escape complete recollection. Of course—some annoying dream.

But nonetheless, Maria was uneasy — sharp with her *duenna*—restless at the confinement in her cabin, which had been at her father's orders.

She spent long hours seated at the elaborate ports, gaz-

ing out over the lonely ocean in the wake of the ship. The craft seemed to move with maddening slowness, even though a spanking wind sent the galleon skimming and dipping toward Spain.

On the first night out, Maria watched the sun go down in the west and thought of all the boring nights she would sit thus. The sun lowered and faded and by its last rays, she thought she saw another ship far off, almost below the horizon. Probably an illusion, she thought.

Dinner was served in her cabin and both her father and the captain joined her. Late in the evening, they retired. Then Maria's *duenna* retired also, to the smaller cabin provided for her close by.

And Maria was alone.

But sleep would not come. Prepared for bed, she lay for a long time looking up at the dark ceiling; and that feeling of uneasiness increased. She arose and flung open the port and sat looking out across the dark, warm sea. The uneasiness. From whence did it come?

Then she remembered. That man—that horrible—horrible—*priest?* No. Of course he had not been a priest. She'd seen him fleetingly in the carriage but a few mornings ago and only now did she remember clearly. Even though he had had on black clothing and wore a reversed collar, there was such terrible, glaring evil about him that the thought of piety was absurd.

Maria, seated at the port, was vaguely aware of a scraping somewhere on the hull of the ship. But her mind was so engrossed in her thoughts, that the sound hardly registered on her conscious mind. She was busy with the revelation of that evil face she had conjured up out of the depths of memory.

Then, as in a dream far too horrible to be even a nightmare, the scraping sound was clearer—close—right under the port. And the evil face itself reared up in the darkness not three feet from her own.

Just then the moon cleared a cloud bank and flung down day-bright rays, and Maria saw the shape of a lean, black schooner hove to close by—and the racing wakes of several long-boats moving toward the galleon.

In a spasm of sheer fright, Maria seized the only weapon handy—a flower vase in a niche by the port and hurled it into the terrible face above the reversed collar. There was

a roar of rage as the pottery bit flesh.

Then, as Maria slammed the port, the Vicar lost his hold upon whatever support he clung to, and pitched downward into the sea.

Maria turned stiffly from the window and the fear within her was a physical, agonizing thing—a genuine, lacelike pain of flesh and soul that demanded surcease by any means.

For a moment, she crouched like a stricken animal. Then her mind cleared partially, and she waited for sounds of action on deck. For the sound of the guns that would smash these pirates. But there were no sounds. Save for the scrapings on the hull, the ship was deathly quiet.

With a fresh influx of energy, Maria forced her body to work—twisted the constriction from her throat.

She managed a shrill, hopeless cry.

Captain de Ortega sprang awake at the sound of grappling hooks on the side of the ship. *Madre de Dios!* What was wrong? Obviously, the ship was being boarded, but why had the watch given no warning? What manner of treachery was this?

The captain was on deck, sword in hand, immediately, to meet the first mate coming forward. Already the heads of the dread *Vampire* crew were appearing from over the sides.

"What's wrong?" de Ortega shouted. "Where is the crew? The soldiers?"

The first mate's face was ashen. "I tried to arouse them. but they've been drugged. The Governor sent a keg of rum aboard to be drunk at mess with his compliments. There must have been a drug in it—"

The first mate got no further. A cutlass, swung from behind, almost severed his head. And the captain too, lost interest as he died from the crushing blow of a marlin spike.

For the crew of the *Vampire* was already in swift deadly action. With surprising silence, they were going through the ship like a deadly plague. With sure, murderous strokes, they slaughtered every living thing—asleep or awake—in their path.

The Vicar himself murdered Miguel Consuegra, whom he found in nightgown and cap standing resolutely in front of Maria's cabin door, sword in hand. One quick, vicious thrust of his rapier, and

there was no one to bar the Vicar's way. He threw himself against the door, only to feel the prick of a knife on his shoulder. He turned to see the fat form of Maria Consuegra's *duenna,* holding a small silver dagger.

The Vicar killed her as he would have killed an annoying fly. A single thrust through her huge breast and she sank quivering to the floor. But even before her heart stopped beating, the Vicar had forgotten her.

He turned again and hurled himself at the stout door. Three times he drove his wiry strength against it before it gave. Then he leaped into the cabin of Maria Consuegra; leaped with a great cry of triumph.

The cry died in his throat.

The beautiful Maria had evidently been made of sterner stuff than anyone had been aware of. And there had been within her, a knowledge of men's cruelty and the Vicar's lust. Because, in the end, she triumphed over him.

He found her facing him as the door splintered, with a dagger driven deep into her own heart. So that, during one final moment—as the Vicar came through the door and she was in the last instant of dying—the sudden and complete transformation within her, was apparent.

During that instant, she stood erect with the crimson slash in her breast to show her defiance. And the cold smile of hate upon her face, showing she had known, at last, the reason for this raid —the nature of the Vicar's unholy lust.

She managed a few final words: "You—carrion! Do you think I'd have let you—touch me—alive?"

Then she fell dead to the floor.

The Vicar's terrible cry went the length and breadth of the ship, and every member of his crew paused, shaken, in the bloody business of slaughter. They listened to his frenzied howl: "The slut! The rotten, dishonest little slut! She foiled me! She took her own dirty little life to cheat *me—me*—the Vicar!"

He staggered to the deck, his eyes glazed with madness, his sword and hands crimson from killing. "But she won't escape. I'll hunt for her! Wherever she's gone, I'll find her! No hole in hell is deep enough for her to hide from me!"

Then he fell to his knees and began to cry and sob like a child.

The Vicar kept his word to the Governor. With a zest exceptional even for him, he cleaned every living thing off the *Lord of the Indies*. Then the vessel was burned and the *Vampire* sailed away from the vast funeral flame—back to Skeleton Cove.

The yacht *Portia*, out of New York on a leisurely southern cruise, quietly plowed the warm waters of the Caribbean. Captain Sam Nathan was at the wheel and the two crewmen, Nick Adams and Frank Thompson were asleep, forward.

Neal Bernard, the owner, and Dr. William Weller, were having a nightcap in the latter's cabin, and the conversation, as was natural, centered around Marcia, Bernard's beautiful Spanish wife.

"She seemed in better shape, tonight," Dr. Weller said, "so I told her to lay off the sleeping tablets. Best not to use them unless necessary."

"I looked in on the way by. She appeared to be sleeping," Bernard said.

Weller lit a cigarette and frowned at his Scotch and soda. "I suggested this cruise, not so much for a change for your wife, as an opportunity to get her away from other people so I could study her case. Not that rest won't do her good."

"I suspected that," Bernard said, quietly. He was a clean-cut man in his middle thirties, but his worried expression made him look older.

"I studied the background you furnished me," Weller said, "but I'd like to go into it with you a little deeper." He turned his eyes on Bernard. "Marcia's ancestry goes far back, I believe."

Bernard glanced up quickly. "You feel that's important?"

"Perhaps — perhaps not. But in the light of the hallucinations she has, I think it of interest."

"I wouldn't call them hallucinations exactly."

"Tell me more about them."

Bernard toyed with his glass as he stared at it. "There seems to be a morbid touch involved. I feel Marcia's mind dwells too much in the past. There have been incidents—"

"Tell me any that you recall."

"Well, just the other night —before we sailed. I entered her room and she was seated at her dressing table looking into the mirror. She turned to me and said, 'Darling, do you believe in reincarnation?' I laughed at her and

said such things were foolish, whereupon, she burst out crying. I took her in my arms and heard her whisper, 'Maria—poor Maria.' I held her and comforted her and finally she quieted down."

"Who is this Maria she spoke of?"

"Oh, some ancester of hers—a girl back in her line. There's a story that this Maria was pursued by a pirate of some sort and killed herself when he got her cornered."

"Is the story true?"

"I'm inclined to doubt it. That, incidently, brings up another thing. Marcia has spent a great deal of money tracing her geneology. I imagine these geneologists—or at least some of them—strive to please their clients. So if they can't come up with fact, they may invent for us a little fiction."

"Then you think the incident of the girl and the pirate might have had modern origination in the mind of a geneologist?"

"I think it's possible. I did a little checking on some of the stuff he came up with and found no historical basis of fact. That wouldn't prove it fiction of course. In fact, the pirate—he was called the Vicar, I believe—the Vicar of Skeleton Cove—actually did exist, but very little is known about him."

Bernard got up and refilled the glasses and handed one back to Dr. Weller. Weller said, "That was roughly how I understood it. A woman morbidly and unhealthily occupied with the past. That motivated another reason for this trip. I thought if we got Marcia down into the Caribbean islands she talks so much about, it might help—might separate reality from fantasy to some extent. It's not impossible, you know."

"You mean that by showing her the places as they really are—some of her illusions might vanish?"

"It's a hope, but let's not worry about it too much. I think we'll be able to straighten her out all right. It was important to get her away from Manhattan and the polo and cocktail set she was running with."

Bernard said, "I don't think she really cared much for that kind of life. I tried to steer her away from it and ran into a little trouble, because Marcia is a high-strung girl and doesn't steer too well. But I always had the feeling she kept that pace because she had to. It was almost as though she felt she had to

keep running from something."

"Well," the doctor said, easily. "We'll dig in and see what we can find."

Bernard was again staring into his glass. "I hope it works out all right."

"Have you any reason to believe it won't?"

"No—no, I haven't, except—"

"Except what?"

"I can't really say. But there's a mystic streak in Marcia—something I don't understand—something that goes deeper than anyone can probe, I'm afraid. I'm fearful, at times, that—"

Both men froze as a scream suddenly ripped through the yacht—the high-pitched scream of a woman in terror.

"Marcia!" Bernard cried.

But Dr. Weller was already at the door.

Marcia Bernard had tossed restlessly in her cabin, unable to sleep, yet not wanting to take the sleeping pills. She had taken far too many of them lately. She had heard footsteps approaching her door and had lain quiet while it opened and her husband came quietly to her bed. She preferred that he think her asleep because she did not feel up to any conversation that might follow if he thought otherwise. He would be very kind and considerate of course; he was a darling and Marcia loved him deeply. But tonight, the mood was upon her, darker than ever, and she did not feel like talking to anyone.

She lay there in the darkness, trying to analyze her problem as she had tried so many times before. As usual, she got nowhere. The bewilderment, the confusion, the fear, remained as strong as ever.

Strange, she thought, that this feeling of being someone else—this strong association with the past had not been a part of her earlier years. Up to a scant six months before, Marcia felt that she had been as normal as anyone. Then there had come that first surge of inner revelation—that was about the only way she could express it—that feeling, first of affinity, then of complete identity with Maria Consuegra y Castilla.

There was a weird and terrible angle to this association. It lay in the fact that she, Marcia Bernard should not have known that a person named Maria Consuegra had ever existed. She had had utterly no way of so knowing—at the time the name, the

appearance, and the fate of Maria had come, full-blown and complete, into her consciousness.

The knowledge of her personal association with the far past had come in that manner—suddenly; one night just before she went to sleep. The following morning Marcia remembered the hallucination and charged it to a nightmare.

But the conviction persisted until, finally, she had been driven to investigation. And the geneologist she hired, had uncovered the whole horrible story, just as she had known, for no other reason than instinct, it would be.

But the maddening part was why?—why?—*why?* By some mental quirk—perhaps through some weird spiritual association she could not understand—Marcia had been apprised of an ancient situation; a long dead incident. Why should it instill within her such an unreasoning fear? And why should she identify herself with a girl who had been dust for centuries?

There was utterly no reason, yet the association persisted and the fear remained real and dreadful.

While these thoughts and questions went through her mind, Marcia got up from her bunk and looked restlessly out the port. The sea was dark and quiet. Knowing that sleep was far away, she stripped off her pajamas and without snapping on the light, found a bathing suit in the open suitcase at her feet. She pulled the suit on and went, barefoot, into the companionway. She tiptoed past the cabin where Dr. Weller and her husband were talking, and went up on deck.

There, under the stars, she lay back in a deck chair and closed her eyes. The soft swell of the sea rocked the boat gently, soothing her. She opened her eyes and saw the vague outlines of Captain Nathan standing forward at the wheel. There was a sudden glow as he turned his head slightly, and Marcia caught the faint odor of shag tobacco as it drifted astern.

She felt much calmer, now; safe and secure. Obviously, it had all been her imagination. This trip would do her good. She could rest and get a grip on herself . . .

Then she screamed.

Bernard and Dr. Weller crowded through the door together. Bernard moved ahead and threw open the door to Marcia's cabin. "She isn't here!"

"On deck!" Weller said,

and they rushed up the companionway to reach the deck just as the lights blazed up. Captain Nathan had switched them on from the wheelhouse and had just emerged and come to the afterdeck.

And now the three men stood frozen at the sight before them.

Marcia, at the rail, aft, cringed back in her deck chair, stiff with fear as she stared at the strange figure on the deck by the starboard rail.

Bernard muttered, "What in heaven's name—!" and sought to force movement into his frozen legs.

The figure was that of a man—a hideous, filthy, crouching little monstrosity in the weird getup Bernard vaguely associated with pirates of the time of Captain Kidd and Porto Bello. A red handkerchief was twisted around his head. He wore dirty black boots and blood-stained pantaloons. But the blood on his clothing and evil face, was nothing to the gore that dripped from the cutlass he clutched in his right hand. A fiendish figure right out of some mad murderer's nightmare.

"My God!" Dr. Weller breathed. "Is it real? Does it actually exist?"

Bernard's first thought was of some grotesque masquerade. He thought of it in terms of the people known to be aboard the yacht. The captain, Weller, and Marcia were in sight. Thus, his mind went to the crewmen. He looked at Captain Nathan. "Which of your men in this? Which one would be fool enough to don an outfit like that and—?"

But at that moment, both Nick Adams and Frank Thompson appeared on deck behind Captain Nathan. Adams was a small man and at sight of the piratical intruder, the sleep fast vanished from his eyes.

Frank Thompson was a different type. Huge and blonde, there was no hesitation in him as he pushed forward. He paused for just a moment as he stepped into the open circle on deck and glanced first at Captain Nathan, then at Bernard and Weller. Quickly sensing that the group was momentarily leaderless, he advanced to challenge the intruder.

The lips of the hideous little man twisted, and as Thompson came within range, the cutlass swung viciously, slashing a red groove across Thompson's chest. Thompson jerked backward into retreat,

appalled by the ferocity of the attack.

The man did not pursue. He crouched with the cutlass poised and one hand gripping the rail. "Avast, ye slobs!" he bellowed in a voice too large for his scant body. "I'll slit the gullet of anyone as moves!"

This threat, coupled with pure amazement, held the five men at bay. The intruder swung his head slowly, like a trapped animal. But more defiance than fear was mirrored in his cruel little eyes. "What craft is this? Where's the Vicar? This ain't the same ship and that's for sure! Who are ye slobs? Speak up 'fore I slit every gullet among ye—me and the Vicar!"

"Where in hell did he come from?" Thompson muttered, looking dully down at the slash in his chest.

Bernard glanced aft and saw that Marcia had mercifully fainted. She lay quite still in the deck chair, her breast rising and falling shallowly.

The intruder's eyes followed those of Bernard and fell upon Marcia. They lit with an evil light. "That's the wench the Vicar's after, and he'll take her—never fear. But how she got here, or how I got here is beyond me poor powers. This ain't the *Lord o' the Indies*, we was strippin' and razin'—that's for sure. There's some devil-magic here."

"Who are you?" Dr. Weller asked.

"Yes—and what movie set did you drop off of?" Captain Nathan added. "Are they shooting in this vicinity?"

"What gibberish are ye talkin' now? I'm Billy Swain, I am. First mate to Henry Cowper o' the *Vampire*. The Vicar, he's called, and a finer specimen o' piety never sailed the Main, I'll vow." Billy Swain stopped to snicker, then turned a cold eye on Thompson. "Are ye the captain o' this craft?"

Nathan spoke up. "I'm the captain, my man. And you'd best lay down that sword and listen to reason. You're in enough trouble now, I'd say."

Dr. Weller spoke low to Captain Nathan. "Are there any arms aboard?"

"An automatic in a drawer in my cabin. Hadn't occurred to me that we'd need arms on this voyage."

"I'm not blaming you, man! I just say—get it—and get it fast!"

Nathan glanced at Thompson. "Get me the gun. Top drawer of my desk." Thomp-

son started forward and Nathan called. "There are shells in the drawer. See that it's loaded."

"Aye, sir," Thompson said, and vanished.

Bernard, bent upon administering to Marcia, moved forward, whereupon Billy Swain took a step from the rail and brandished his cutlass. "Stay where ye are! We'll all stay quiet 'til the Vicar comes for the girl."

Bernard's face darkened and he was about to lunge at the little sailor, but Weller put a hand on his arm. "Better wait. He's obviously not planning to harm her. The gun will be here in a moment."

Swain's little eyes narrowed. "Gun? Why ye're unarmed, ye fools! There's not a cannon in sight. The Vicar'll make short work o' this tub! Ye can vow to that."

And thus did the grotesque tableau remain, like something out of a horror picture, until Nathan scowled and said, "What's wrong with the fool? He should have the gun here by now!"

"Maybe we'd best rush this little beggar and have it over with," Adams suggested.

Before Nathan had a chance to reply, Thompson appeared, carrying a blue steel .45 automatic. Nathan held out his hand and Thompson handed him the gun.

"All right, my man," Nathan said with decision. "Now you can put that sword down. I'm in command here."

Billy Swain looked at the .45 and revealed broken, rotted teeth in an obscene grin. "Ye plan to make me in with that?"

Nathan raised the pistol grimly, sighted carefully down the barrel, and the gun roared. The cutlass in Billy Swain's hand flew across the deck as Swain yowled and grasped one numbed hand in the other. His look of hatred seared out at Nathan. "Some strange kind o' weapon, eh? Well, ye make a mistake, me bucko. Ye're load's gone now, and me cutlass'll taste ye're gullet."

Swain moved, without fear, toward his bloody cutlass. The .45 roared again. Swain flung himself backward, cursing. He snatched at his arm where Nathan's bullet had grazed his flesh, and stared in sudden awe at the .45. "Twice it blasted! Two loads in it. What manner o' gun is that?"

"There are many more than two, my man," Nathan said. "I can blow your brains

out any time I wish. Would you like me to prove it?"

Billy Swain—whatever else he might have been—was no fool. He rubbed his arm and a certain respect appeared in his eyes. "No need—no need. I'll be docile enough, 'cause I can afford to be. When the Vicar comes, he'll be swarmin' all over ye. He'll exact vengeance enough for both me and him—ye can vow to that!"

Swain's eyes turned to the motionless Marcia. He grinned and added, "And the Vicar'll be takin' that wench and havin' his way with her. Nice o' ye to have her all naked and waitin' for him."

Bernard had started toward the rail and Marcia. At Swain's words, he turned suddenly and slammed a fist into the little pirate's face. Swain went over backwards, squalling with rage. He scrambled to his feet and would have lunged at Bernard, but Thompson stepped quickly in, picked Swain up by the collar of his jacket and slapped him, backhand and forehand again and again.

When he was through, he dropped Swain and the latter fell to his knees, the fight taken out of him. But he did not show any sign of a broken or defeated spirit. Rather, he seemed to have decided the odds were too big against him and that the better part of valor was a demonstration of docility.

His eyes flicked toward Marcia, now in her husband's arms, then back to Captain Nathan. "I'm in your hands, Cap'in. And I trust you ain't the unfair kind which'd injure a helpless man."

Nathan looked at Swain uncertainly and seemed somewhat at a loss. Dr. Weller said, "I'd like to talk to this man, Captain, if you'd be good enough to arrange it. Perhaps there's a spare cabin you could lodge him in until we can get to the bottom of this thing."

Captain Nathan handed Dr. Weller the pistol. "Thompson and Adams will take him forward, but if you're bent on interviewing him, you'd best have this handy. The little devil would slit your throat with a penknife if you gave him the chance."

"Thank you," Weller said, accepting the gun.

Nathan turned his attention to Bernard. He said, "I imagine you'll want to turn back after this occurrence, Mr. Bernard?"

Bernard, moving toward the companionway with Marcia in his arms, said. "I think

that would be best. Give us a few minutes to check my wife's condition. Then I'll give you a word."

"Very well, sir." Nathan turned and went back to the wheelhouse.

A few minutes later, both Bernard and Dr. Weller stood in Marcia's cabin, looking down at the girl. She lay quietly in her berth and Dr. Weller was returning a hypodermic needle to its case. "It was a very mild shot," he said, "but enough to keep her quiet for the rest of the night, I think."

Bernard's expression showed deep concern. "You're sure she'll be all right?"

"Physically—yes. As to the rest of this—this madness—you know as much as I do."

"Do you think we'd better return to New York?"

"I don't know. Let's question that little character first and see if we can find any sense in all this."

They went forward and found Thompson and Adams standing in the companionway outside one of the doors.

"Did you have any trouble?" Bernard asked.

"Not a bit," Thompson said. Then he added, darkly, "I was wishing he'd kick up a fuss—start some trouble I could finish—but he was too smart for that."

Dr. Weller moved close to Thompson and inspected the gash in his chest. It had stopped bleeding and was now caked with dried blood. "I guess I forgot about you. We'll have to disinfect that."

"It's nothing. I'll just wash it off a little. There's some alcohol in my quarters I can douse it with."

Dr. Weller peered closely at the wound and turned grimly to Bernard. "It's real enough, anyhow. Nothing phantom about that cut." He moved toward the cabin door, glancing over his shoulder at Thompson. "Wash it and pour some alcohol on it. When I come out I'll paint it with iodine."

"Aye, sir," Thompson said.

Dr. Weller entered the cabin. Bernard followed him and closed the door.

Billy Swain sat on the edge of the bunk, waiting. He was meek enough and made no hostile motion as the two men entered.

"We'd like to talk to you," Weller said.

"I'm agreeable," Swain shrugged. "Talk's cheap and I've got nothing to do until the Vicar comes."

Dr. Weller sat down opposite Swain holding the gun loosely as he stared at him.

Swain's eyes, like the twin tongues of a snake, were on the weapon. Weller asked, "What makes you so sure the Vicar will come?"

"Oh, he'll come all right. He swore an oath to get that lass. He'll come wherever she is."

"Where did you come from?"

"Me—well that's kind o' hard to say, mate. I recollect we'd just taken the *Lord o' the Indies* and leveled 'er right down to the water—"

"I suppose you're referring to a ship?"

"What else? A Spanish galleon, she was—" Swain snickered in an evil way he had. "—'til we laid 'er aboard. Then she was a flamin' funeral pyre and ye can vow to that!"

"What became of the people aboard?"

"We killed 'em to a man, and oh, but the Vicar was mad I can tell ye, when he found the girl had done away with herself—"

"Just what girl are you referring to?"

Billy Swain scowled. "Ye're daft or else ye're baitin' me, man! What girl would I mean but the Consuegra lass? Standin' there in her cabin when he broke in—a dagger in her heart and a laugh on her lips—defy him, she did, and the Vicar is no man to defy. He swore an oath she couldn't go so deep or so far but what he'd find her."

Bernard and Dr. Weller looked at each other in amazement. Then their eyes went back to the intruder. Bernard asked, "Have you any idea what year this is?"

"The year?" Swain shrugged. "Couldn't say for sure, but what difference does it make? Seafarin' men pay little attention to the passin' o' time. A short life and a happy one, they say, and avoid Execution Dock at all costs." Swain grinned an evil, cheery grin and waited for the next question.

Dr. Weller threw it. "Then you don't know you're in the twentieth century?"

"Wouldn't be havin' the least idea."

"What do you suppose makes this ship move?"

"Why sail, o' course. What else could do it?"

"Did you see any sails when you were topside?"

"Come to think of it now, I didn't, but I was pretty busy lookin' at a lot of other things."

"There are no sails on this ship."

"She's a galley, then?"

"Have you seen any oars?"

"Can't say I've been lookin' very hard."

Weller got sullenly to his feet. "Come with me. I'll show you what makes this ship go."

Bernard looked at the doctor questioningly, but Weller's expression revealed little. Bernard said, "First, I think we should make up our minds as to what we're going to do. I vote for returning to New York."

Weller thought for a moment. "Perhaps that would be best," he said. "I can think of no reason for continuing this cruise."

"Very well, I'll go tell Captain Nathan." He turned and left the cabin.

A moment later, Weller emerged behind Billy Swain. "We're going to have a look at the engine," he said, and nudged Swain with the automatic.

Adams, still in the companionway, was surprised, but he shrugged and turned to lead the way. A few moments later, Swain was staring at the engine below and aft, with Dr. Weller watching him keenly the while.

"Somethin' out of a devil's cauldron to be sure!" Swain muttered. He was now genuinely and completely awed. "The evil thing's alive and yet it's made from iron. By all the saints—"

"It's an engine," Dr. Weller said, his keen eyes fixed on Swain's face. "It's run by gasoline and it turns a screw that drives the ship ahead."

Swain was not interested. His eyes darted about in fear and he backed up against the wall. "Some spell it is that ye've put over me. Maybe the lass is a witch. That's it! A witch—and she's thrown a spell over the galleon to make it look different to a poor simple sailor man."

"But you said she was dead."

"Witches don't never die—ye know that. Ye're in on it and ye're mockin' a poor simple sailor."

At that moment Bernard came from informing Captain Nathan of the change in plans. As he entered the engine room, Dr. Weller was just prodding Billy Swain toward the door. Weller said, "I've found out what I wanted to know—or I think I've found it out. Let's get this man back to his cabin so we can have a talk."

In Bernard's cabin, a few minutes later, Dr. Weller paced the floor and asked, "Well, what do you make of it?"

Bernard shrugged in a

hopeless manner. "I don't know. None of it makes any sense. Obviously, Swain was rowed to the yacht from some other ship, but for what purpose—"

"There's no other ship within reasonable distance."

"How do you know—?"

"The radarscope is clear. I was at the wheel and I'd have picked up even the rowboat. But there wasn't any."

"Then a helicopter or—"

"There was nothing in the air, either."

"That leaves but one answer. He boarded us at New York as a stowaway."

Dr. Weller looked sharply at the yacht's owner. "You don't really believe that, do you? No one could have stowed away on this boat."

"No. It certainly doesn't seem possible, but—"

"I believe," Weller said quietly, "that we have to adjust our thinking a little. I'm afraid—to begin with—we've got to forget the logical and concede the impossible."

"You mean we've got to admit he came on as a stowaway, even though it's impossible?"

"Not exactly. At first, I wouldn't give up the notion that our little intruder was an actor. But he isn't. He's the genuine article. Exactly what he says he is. And he came right from where he said he did."

"You mean from the past? Out of that old piratical era? Why I never heard of anything so absurd!"

"Absurd or not, it's true. That was why I took him down to see the engine. Up to that time he could have been acting, but I watched him as he viewed the engine and *that was no act.* The man was genuinely terrified. I tell you there was such a man as the Vicar who ranged out of a place called Skeleton Cove. And this Swain served under him and still thinks he's serving him."

"But man! Hundreds of years have passed since—"

"Not for Swain, they haven't. And I'm wondering if any time has passed for the Vicar."

Bernard was stunned. "But—but if we can't go by reason, then what—"

Weller was pacing up and down, his face bleak. "There are more things in heaven and earth—"

"For God's sake! Quit quoting Shakespeare and think of something."

"All I can think of is to get back to New York as fast as we can."

"That order has been given."

"One fact stands out. We're faced with the illogical and we've got to face back at it until we can get clear of it. There's nothing else we can do."

"But what can we do without logic to fall back on?"

Weller sat down on the edge of the bunk. "All this *is* logical. It's just—"

"Logical? Why, you're a fool, man!"

"I was going to say, it's just something we can't understand. Therefore we say there's no sense to it. Thus we're mistaking our own ignorance for a disruption of the natural law."

"Fine reasoning, but how does it help us?"

Weller appeared to ignore the question. "I think an error in time is involved here somewhere."

"An error in time? How can time err?"

"It's been known to happen. There have been cases of it, that is. There is one laid in France—in the gardens of Versailles—"

Bernard was in obvious distress. He sprang up and said, "Stay on the track, man! What has France got to do with that little heathen flopping down on our deck and—?"

"Nothing. I was just trying to cite a possible angle of what we're up against—or may be. It's been established that once in a while, time bends—for want of a better way to put it—and events of different time periods, as we know them, get mixed up."

"Something or somebody's mixed up, I'll grant that," Bernard said, miserably. "But I won't buy the other. There's a logical explanation to all this and it'll come out."

"I hope we live to see it," Bernard said gloomily.

"You think our lives are actually in danger?"

"The little sailor may be composed of smoke and fantasy," Weller replied. "But there was nothing unreal about that sword slash that Thompson got across his chest. If the blade had gone straight in, Thompson would be dead now—fairy tale or not."

"But what are we going to do? We've got to do something!"

"We're doing it as fast as we can. We're heading back to port."

Just then, Captain Nathan presented himself. Both men looked up—saw the disturbed, bewildered expression on his face.

"All right, man," Bernard

demanded. "What is it? What is wrong?"

"The ship, sir. Something's gone radically wrong with the ship."

"What? What is it?"

"The yacht refuses to obey it's controls."

"That's absurd!" Bernard snapped.

"It certainly is, but the fact remains—the craft will not respond. We're in the grip of something — some sort of magnetic field, I'd say, although I've never heard of nor seen the like of it before."

"In short," Weller said, "you can't turn around?"

"That's right. The wheel turns; the rudder obeys; but the yacht doesn't. It stays right on its previous course, pulling against the rudder—pulling against everything."

"It's impossible—impossible," Bernard muttered in a dazed voice.

"That it is sir. And another thing. When she started disobeying, I stopped the engine, figuring at least if we couldn't turn back, we wouldn't go any further forward."

"And—?"

"It didn't do any good."

"It didn't do any good to stop the engine?" Bernard asked incredulously.

"That's right. The yacht keeps right on moving ahead in a straight line—on its previous course—at its previous speed."

Bernard stared helplessly at Dr. Weller. "God help us!" he muttered.

The sun was quarter-high in the heavens, and Bernard stood by the rail, staring gloomily down into the sea. He was watching the frothing wake left by a ship without visible means of propulsion. The engine was silent and had been so for a long time. There wasn't a breath of wind. Yet the boat kept right on plowing through the sea.

A footstep startled Bernard and he turned to see Dr. Weller approaching. Weller looked at his watch and said, "At least this thing—whatever we're entrapped in—doesn't effect modern time pieces in the slightest."

Bernard glanced at his own wristwatch. "Ten after ten."

"The hours keep passing."

"You looked in on Marcia?"

"Yes. She's awake. I think you'd better go down and talk to her."

"Do you think she should have another shot?"

Weller frowned and shook his head. "I see no good reason for keeping her completely under. She'll be groggy for a while."

"That will keep off any possible hysteria?"

"It should. But you'd better drop down."

"How's our visitor making out?"

"Gone cocky again. Keeps saying things will change when the Vicar gets here."

Bernard shuddered. "Thank God that can never happen."

"I wonder," Weller muttered.

Bernhard had turned away to go below. He stopped. "What did you say?"

"Nothing—nothing . . ."

Marcia lay, wide-eyed and pale, in her bunk. She looked up as Bernard entered. He went to his knees and kissed her gently, but she did not respond. She returned her eyes to the ceiling and stared as though she were watching a panorama that no one could see but herself.

"Is he here yet?" she whispered.

"Is who here, darling?"

"The Vicar."

"Why, that's foolish!"

"No it isn't foolish. You're just trying to protect me. He *has* come, hasn't he?"

"Darling! The Vicar—whoever he is—will not come. He isn't here now and he will never be."

"He will come."

"Marcia. Stop saying that!"

She looked at him and smiled sadly. She raised a hand and passed it through his hair. "Poor dear. Forgive me for dragging you into this. No husband should see his wife dragged away by a pirate. Ravished—"

"Marcia!"

"You see, my darling. It's an old, old story, and only I know the end—the Vicar and I. In the final act, he will have me. In the end perhaps I will be too tired to resist. Perhaps I will submit and have it over with."

Bernard was desperate and the desperation showed in his voice. "Marcia! I want you to stop talking like that! It's all a hallucination. A horrible nightmare that will pass—"

She shook her head slowly. "No. It will not. There must be a final end to every drama of life and there will be an end to this one."

"The end will be back in New York, when you're rested and your mind is clear."

She drew his head to her breast. "You see, my darling, centuries ago, the Vicar swore an oath, a terrible oath, and the Vicar is a very strong-minded man."

"Was a strong-minded man, dear. He's dead—dead—"

"Yes, dead in the way you

understand death, but you do not know the whole truth of such matters. You do not know that the Vicar lives and will be immortal for a while —feeding on the power of his lust and greed and hate."

"Darling, please try to sleep."

"You do not know that all this has happened before—down through the years—that I, Maria Consuegra, was not allowed to really die, because I committed the unforgivable sin of taking my own life. In the scheme of things, that is a greater sin that even violation of the body—the violation of a woman's body by a man—of a woman's mind by the mind of a strong man. Suicide. I was not allowed to escape so easily."

Bernard had run out of words. He knelt there holding his wife while she went on with the weird explanation.

"As I said, this has happened before. Three times in the centuries that have passed, the Vicar came for me. Three times, reincarnated in the image of his lust and hatred, he swooped down aboard his black *Vampire* and demanded my body and soul."

Bernard was weeping softly from the emotional strain and the horror of Marcia's story. She stopped while he kissed her, then went on in a flat, emotionless voice.

"And each time I foiled him in the same way; each time he found a dead body waiting for him in the cabin of a captive ship."

"My darling, you've got to stop—"

"But each time it grows harder for me—putting off the inevitable by driving a knife into my heart. Each time the pain is greater. The agony grows stronger at every repetition of the act. The shame and humiliation multiply—"

She stopped speaking and they were silent for a time as she cradled his head on her breast. Then she said, "Darling—you must get me a dagger."

Bernard stiffened. "No—Marcia!"

"It is the only way. I must have my dagger. Again I must thwart him. Maybe for the last time, but I must do it. I must lie here and gain strength for the deed, because the time will come all too soon."

"Marcia! We'll protect you —defend you—"

She shook her head sadly. "King Philip's picked men could not do it. Against the

Vicar's power, there is no defense but the dagger."

Bernard, emotionally exhausted, got slowly to his feet. Marcia closed her eyes and he looked down at her, wondering if she'd dropped off to sleep.

He turned hopelessly away from the bunk and saw Dr. Weller standing in the doorway. Bernard opened his mouth to speak, but Weller put a finger to his lips and motioned.

Bernard followed him into the companionway and up on deck. There, Weller turned and said, "I suppose I should apologize for eavesdropping, but I think this affair has gotten beyond conventional courtesies. I wanted to hear the story—so I listened."

Bernard showed no resentment. "What—what do you make of it?"

Lines of deep worry had appeared on Weller's face. "To say it's horrible, is rather trite."

"But the truth of it man! Oh, God! There *is* no truth in it. There *can't* be!"

"We may as well face it. It's obvious that the boat is moving without reason as we know reason. It's obvious that our visitor is who he claims to be. Therefore, have we any right to deny the rest?"

Bernard put his face in his hands. "I don't know—I don't know—"

"Come with me," Weller said, grimly. "There's something that has to be checked."

"What?"

"Something I should have checked long ago, but didn't have the courage."

Weller led Bernard to the wheelhouse, where Captain Nathan had his charts. Nathan was staring glassily out across the wheel toward the forward horizon.

Weller said, "Captain, have you checked the course we're on?"

Nathan turned. "Indeed I have. It seems to have changed somewhat. We've swung south-southeast and we're moving in this direction." He indicated their position on the chart.

Weller took a ruler and bent over the table. He projected a line along the ruler until his pencil came to a small group of islands on the chart. Then he bent closer and scrutinized the chart closer.

He straightened and looked at Bernard, his finger indicating a place on the chart. "Read that name," he said.

Bernard bent down, squinted and read slowly. He straightened in a spasm of

tright, his eyes wide. "My God! Skeleton Cove!"

"That's right," Weller said, grimly. "We've been heading straight for the Vicar's lair."

Several hours had passed. Nothing had happened except that the yacht had held steadily to its strange course; that the sun had moved on across the sky; that it was now afternoon.

Again Weller and Bernard stood by the rail looking grimly out over the sea. Weller had a black bulldog pipe gripped tightly in his teeth.

He took it out, tapped it against the rail, and said, "There's just one thing I can't rationalize in this time warp thing."

"Good Lord!" Bernard said, "Can you rationalize any of it?"

"Yes, in a vague way—taking into consideration that there is much I don't understand but that I must believe what I see."

Bernard had no reply, and Weller said, "But the one point I can't tie in is the undisputable fact that time demands its price."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think we have a right to assume that time-warps—slipping from one time into another—are phenonema that come about by some unexplainable accident in the overall cycles; that regardless of how strange they are to us, they can't violate natural law."

"That sounds logical—I guess." Bernard said, hopelessly.

"Well, we know it's a natural law that time demands its toll. Everything that passes through time shows the results of so-doing."

"What are you driving at?"

Weller frowned. "I don't quite know myself. I guess I'm just groping. I can see where, once or twice, the natural law —time's demands—might be circumvented. A little like the possibility of a man throwing one hundred sevens—for instance—with a pair of dice, but—"

"I wish you'd tell me what you're trying to prove!"

For the first time, Weller showed the wear on his nerves. "I don't know! But I don't believe in cringing—in waving my arms and shouting 'Hopeless—hopeless!' all the time."

Bernard reacted to the criticism. "I'm sorry, man. I guess I have seemed to funk it, but—but Marcia is my wife. I'm in love with her! I—"

Weller laid an arm across Bernard's shoulders. "I understand. And I'm sorry. Forget my outburst."

"You're certainly entitled to one."

"I had no right to rough you."

"At least," Bernard said. "We have an automatic with plenty of ammunition. Maybe things won't turn out—"

"That's another thing I want to check. I gave the gun back to Nathan. Let's go to the wheelhouse."

"You want to oil the gun up and get it ready? That's a good idea."

Weller said nothing. When they got to the wheelhouse, they saw the gun lying on the chart table. Weller picked it up. After a few moment's hesitation, he glanced at Bernard, then turned and pointed the gun out a window. He pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

He tried again and again with the same result. Bernard, alarmed, said, "It must be empty. Did you take out the shells, Nathan?"

The Captain shook his head dully. Weller took the gun by the barrel and jerked the shell case from the handle. It was almost full. He stared at it stonily.

Bernard snatched the gun. "This is absurd! It's got to work. It's just stuck. We'll clean it."

"That won't do any good," Weller said.

"Why not, man? Good heavens—"

"May as well try to stop this ship. Whatever forces are at work against us haven't overlooked the gun."

Nathan appeared dazed. He whispered. "Let's face it. We're helpless—helpless in the face of some terrible, killing power!"

Weller had taken the gun back from Bernard's nerveless fingers. He held it for a few moments as he raised his eyes to the sea. Then he laid the gun down, not lowering his eyes, and said quietly, "He's come."

"Who?" Bernard asked.

"The Vicar. Look out there."

Nathan and Bernard turned in the direction Weller indicated. Bernard gasped at what was to be seen. Standing off the port bow was a ship.

A long, black, cruel looking ship that flew a flag decorated with a skull and crossbones.

And so close they could see the dread name on the hull:

Vampire.

"There he is," Bernard said listlessly. And the listlessness itself was a strange thing. As

though the men had been caught in the spell of the time and the event and were also held powerless—like the gun and the yacht—immobilized robots fated to be observers in a drama that would come to pass though all reason and all heaven barred the way.

"Yes," Weller said, without inflection. "The Vicar."

"Where?" Nathan asked, like a man inquiring as to the whereabouts of a minor point of interest.

"There by the rail, surrounded by his men. They're prepared to board us. They're coming alongside."

"No," Bernard said, quietly. "They're lowering a boat."

"Right you are," Nathan said, almost brightly. His interest appeared to be that of a child watching a motion picture—a rather boring one.

"There's something I forgot," Bernard said.

"What was that?" Weller asked.

"Marcia—Maria wanted a dagger. I forgot to get it for her."

"Too late now," Weller said in a voice indicating it wasn't very important.

"I guess you're right," Bernard said, lazily.

They watched the bloody crew pile into the long boat. They heard the shout and saw the brandished cutlasses. And they saw the obscene figure of the Vicar—a vast, black sacrilege—standing in the prow of the boat like evil incarnate. They watched the long boat skim swiftly toward the yacht.

They heard the scraping of wood as the boat came alongside. They saw the heads of the pirates as they came up the side to lay the yacht aboard. They heard the yells, the curses.

At that moment, the three men seemed to tear loose, to some extent from their lethargy. "Good God!" Weller muttered. "We've got to fight. We've got to fight. Get clubs. Get wrenches—anything!"

But it was too late. The men stood rooted.

Then a swift and terrible change came over the scene. It seemed that a great wind had arisen and was shrieking around the yacht. Yet nothing moved. Not a hair on any head was disturbed. Only the sound of a howling gale and the strange feeling of terrific upset and displacement was apparent.

The Vicar had boarded the yacht and was advancing toward the wheelhouse, his cutlass raised.

Now, in the center of the

shrieking, unmoving wind, he stopped; froze into a statue with a look of agony and horror on his terrible face.

And all around him, his men froze also. For perhaps a long second, they remained thus; and the three in the wheelhouse, were treated to an amazing sight.

The Vicar's face wrinkled before their eyes. His form shriveled. The sword became too heavy to hold and it fell to the deck. But this was only a passing moment as the storm raged on and took its toll. In another instant, the Vicar shriveled. The flesh left his body; the clothing he wore turned ragged and rotted away in another second. Then the Vicar was only a skeleton falling to the deck.

And all around him, his men were experiencing the same fate. A marauding force of skeletons. Until the bones disintegrated swiftly into dust—aged centuries in a few seconds.

"Look," Weller breathed. "The ship!"

The men raised their eyes and saw the Vampire going swiftly to pieces. Her sails turned to rags and vanished. The wood of her hull rotted swiftly. A derelict. Then she sank beneath the sea.

"It happened," Weller said.

"What?" Bernard asked.

"Time took its toll. Time exerted the wear of centuries in a few seconds. It was as though the Vicar stepped into a whirling propeller. He managed to dodge it several times by mere chance, but he could not do it forever."

"Gone—all gone," Nathan muttered.

Bernard seemed to come out of a daze. "Marcia!" he said. "She will also be—"

Weller shook his head. "No—she'll be all right. She's not Maria Consuegra now. Her progress through time was in a different natural way. She'll be all right. But you'd better send someone to Billy Swain's cabin—to sweep out the old bones."

"The ship's working again," Nathan said. "She's stopped driving ahead."

Weller smiled and point shoreward. "And just in time. Look there. Skeleton Cove."

"That it is," Nathan said.

"But its curse is now gone. The Vicar will sail out no more."

"That's a blessing, sir."

Bernard had vanished below, and Weller said, "I think I can safely give you an order Captain."

"What's that, sir?"

"Back to New York."

"Aye, aye, sir." **THE END**

THE APPOINTMENT

BY RAYMOND STARK

He was just another madman in a world full of madmen. Luckily he had enough sense to see a good psychiatrist. (P. S. The psychiatrist is now looking for a good psychiatrist.)

HE WAS a thin man with a gray look about him. He had been shuffling aimlessly along the crowded street; now he paused to look at a window display of pots and pans.

He was the only person looking at the display. He concentrated for a moment, and imagined the contents of the window completely out of existence.

The pots and pans vanished. The thin man squared his shoulders.

I am God, he thought; and looked around to see if anyone realized the fact besides himself.

Apparently no one did, for the stream of passers-by did not shift course, nor did they disperse to render him homage. He felt a little let-down. Godship without homage was a tasteless thing.

He looked without favor at a pot-bellied man in a gray suit. He did not like pot-bellied men with gray suits.

He imagined him out of existence, then surveyed the spot he had occupied with satisfaction.

A hand tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned, half-startled by the interruption.

"You'll have to move on, buddy," a blue-coated figure told him. "Can't have you hanging around my beat. I'm sorry for you bums, but—" He let the words hang in the air while he waited for the thin man to move.

Because the words had been touched with a certain impartial kindness, the thin

man did not imagine him out of existence. He moved on. He was glad the day was warm enough; otherwise, he would have had to imagine a new sun into existence. He laughed at the thought.

He shuffled along, content for the moment to study the objects about him, and the people. The bump on his head still ached. He surmised that it was responsible for his lack of memory faculties. He did not know how he had gotten it, or when.

The thin man remembered nothing about himself except his identity. He was God.

Beyond this there was a heavy haze of forgetfulness. He tried to think about it, but the effort was too much. He gave up and concentrated on being God. It was fun!

A stray dog snapped at him. He imagined it into nothingness. He stumbled against a fire hydrant; suddenly there was no hydrant. He saw an orange and yellow bus leaving the corner. He suddenly decided he would ride.

The bus was yards away, in low gear. He imagined it back at the corner and boarded it.

The driver wanted money, so he imagined a handful of coins in his pocket, and handed them over. He sat down beside a fattish woman who hitched herself away disapprovingly.

I know who I am, but I know nothing else. Could I be insane? The thought was intriguing and he kept it with him while the bus made several stops.

Finally the driver looked back and said, "End of the line, Mac. You want off?" He got off, looked around. This section of town was drab in look and outlook. It could be only a portion of the slums.

He kept thinking about being crazy. If he were crazy, then maybe he wasn't God at all—He dismissed the idea as an absurdity. He was God. Why quibble?

He grew hungry and entered a small restaurant where the flies cavorted merrily over uncovered slabs of pie.

He ordered, ate, and left, after paying the man with what was left of the money he had imagined into his pocket previously. He felt better, but he could not rid himself of the idea of insanity.

To reassure himself, he carefully imagined a large alley cat into limbo. The cat disappeared.

But maybe, the thought came, maybe the cat just ran

"This," the psychiatrist said, "is an hallucination."

away fast. Cats do run fast, you know.

A doctor.

Yes. Why not a doctor?

He imagined that the torn, discarded object lying beside him on the tenement steps where he rested was a telephone book.

He pored over the pages, found a psychiatrist's office listed a few blocks away, and began walking again. The sun was going behind the clouds and he imagined the disappearance of the clouds. They obliged. He walked on cheerfully.

People were staring at him oddly, he noticed, but he paid them little attention. He knew his apparel was dirty and frayed. But he was God and such things did not matter. He could have vengefully imagined them all out of existence, but decided to show mercy until he talked to the psychiatrist. Then . . .

The psychiatrist had his office in a dingy building whose lower floor housed a flower shop, grocery, and liquor store respectively. The office was on the second floor.

There was no receptionist in the waiting room. There were some chairs, and soon

there was the psychiatrist himself, who smiled pleasurably when he saw his visitor.

"Come in," he invited. His smile showed large white teeth that almost overshadowed all other features of his face. He was a dark man. He looked the way a psychiatrist ought to look.

The thin man entered uneasily. Now that he was here he wasn't sure he wanted any part of it. Suppose he *was* insane? It would be the asylum. There was a trembling within him, which the psychiatrist noticed professionally.

He led the way to a comfortable couch. "Just lie down and relax," he said. "Then we'll get down to what ails you." He smiled reassuringly, but the thin man could see a sharp look of inquiry right behind the big-toothed smile.

He lay down wearily. He was tired—tired and puzzled. The only thing he knew for certain was that he was God. The rest was a blank.

The psychiatrist was all business. He pulled over a chair and sat down to talk, shrewd eyes collecting facts about the thin man before he said a word.

"My fee is $25," he stated, with a longer look at the man's attire. "I thought it best to mention it."

"Yes," agreed the man on the couch; and immediately imagined this sum of money into existence. He reached into a pocket, pulled out a billfold and extracted the money, which he handed to the psychiatrist.

"Ah . . ." said the psychiatrist, beaming. He leaned forward and spoke in a confidential tone.

"Now—what is wrong with you, or what do you imagine to be wrong with you?"

"I am God," said the thin man.

The psychiatrist pursed his lips and tapped a pencil reflectively against his large teeth.

"Interesting. Very interesting," he murmured. "And what makes you believe you are God?"

The man on the couch stirred uncomfortably. "God can do anything. He is all-powerful. I can do anything. I am all-powerful. Therefore, as you can surely see, I am God." There was some impatience in the words, which the psychiatrist hastened to assuage.

"Of course, of course. That is plausible." He hesitated, then asked, "But what do you mean you can do anything?"

"I can move buildings," came the quiet voice of the

thin man. "I can cause mountains to crumble. I can kill people merely by wishing them dead. I could even destroy the world, if I wished."

"Have you ever done any of these things?" The psychiatrist's voice still maintained its interest, but a trace of boredom was setting in.

"Yes." The man who called himself God explained what things he had done.

"Then you remember nothing of your background. Nothing at all? Only these incidents?"

The thin man shook his head, and waited.

A few other questions; then the psychiatrist leaned back. "Your ailment is a simple one," he said impressively. "You are—as far as I can determine from your first visit—suffering from schizophrenia, or what we call split personality. In your case, I should diagnose from your head injury that you have had a fall or received a blow that brought into existence your lesser "personality" that believes itself to be God." The psychiatrist paused and studied his patient.

"Of course, you are not God. That is purely in the realms of your imagination. All it will take to start you back on the right path is to realize that you cannot . . . uh . . . be God. The instances of apparent miracles you related to me all sound like the imaginings of a mind that is ins—, that is tired. You will need more treatments."

He stood and motioned the thin man to do the same. He laid a hand on the man's bony shoulder confidently.

"But you are wrong," the patient insisted. "I do perform miracles."

"Nonsense," the doctor told him quietly. "You must find a way to disbelieve that." He considered. "Why not put your 'miracles' to the acid test? What would be hardest of all things for you to do?"

"Destroy the world, I think."

"Then—destroy the world," the psychiatrist advised, with a faint smile behind the words. "The failure to do so will convince you that you are not God."

"But I wouldn't want to do that. I made the world."

The psychiatrist was losing his patience a little. "You *can't* do that," he insisted. "It's all in your head. Try it, fail; and you'll improve a thousand per cent. Here—" he scribbled some dates on a slip of paper—"I've made you these appointments. They end July 16th. We'll get you

straightened out. I promise you that."

The thin man said hesitantly, "You mean that I can't really destroy the world. That my brain is merely twisted, and you will cure me?" He glanced down at the slip of paper on which there were dates.

"Precisely that."

The thin man needed more reassurance. "It would be right for me to destroy the world? Right now?" He was confused and showed it.

The psychiatrist's voice was as thin as paper. "Yes. Go right ahead, my friend. Destroy it."

The thin man drew himself up and revealed a certain dignity of manner as he folded his arms across his chest. "It will take a while," he said.

For a minute he remained in that position, eyes half closed, body intent.

The psychiatrist waited, patiently and disdainfully. Finally the thin man turned to him and said, "There, it's all done."

A loud snort burst from between the big teeth of the psychiatrist. It was unprofessional; it was without dignity; he couldn't help it.

"You say the world's destroyed? Then—" he pointed a finger at the man before him—"what are we doing here—alive?"

He ran to the window. "Here, I'll show you. Look out." He himself did so, and his face took on a dough-like hue. His hands began trembling, not in a quick spasm of motion, but slowly and methodically. He turned back to the thin man. It was a while before he could speak. When he could, he said in a peculiar voice:

"But it's all gray out there. All clouds. Nothing but clouds and haze. No buildings, no people . . ." He stared at his patient while the rush of words stuck in his throat.

"Yes. It would be that way."

"But—it can't be. I'm seeing things. You're—" An animal cunning suddenly lit his eyes and his breathing reverted almost to normal.

"The world is not destroyed. I don't know what's happened, but I know that much. I could be hypnotized . . ."

He paused, and there was savage triumph in his next words.

"If the world has been destroyed, then what are we doing here? Tell me that! Why are we left?" He waited, almost defiantly, while the thin man looked at him oddly.

"Why," said the thin man,

"you should really know that."

"I should? I know nothing about it."

"It is so simple." The thin man smiled. "The world has been destroyed. We remain to keep the appointments we made." He pointed to the list of dates in his hand.

The psychiatrist walked slowly to the window. He stared out, then came back.

He started to say something, but only a scream managed to find its way past his lips.

"They end July 16th," said the thin man. **THE END**

THE COURTSHIP OF 53 SHOTL 9 G

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 91

what they hear and what they can see that she has to repeat the name of the horse three times. Then she has a last look around, smells the air and says to the kids, "You've seen the place now so shut up."

And with that Floral Pants or Purple Kilt or Five Three Shotl Nine G or whatever he's called manipulates the same thing as before and for the second time the tempede shivers out of existence.

"Holy Mother of God!" says Bandon, kneeling among the shillings.

The others do the same because nobody less than the Devil himself can come to Connemara and make a woman conceive seven times in two seconds.

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And that's not all either. A glance at the racing records will show you that Early Mist won the Grand National at twenty to one and him carrying a chronic load of Ballykilljoy's shillings on his back.

Don't think you can curry favor with Father Felim by telling him this story. Because it was himself who purified the Devil's money with prayer and holy water before he took away half a sackful for the Poor Sisters of Clare.

THE END

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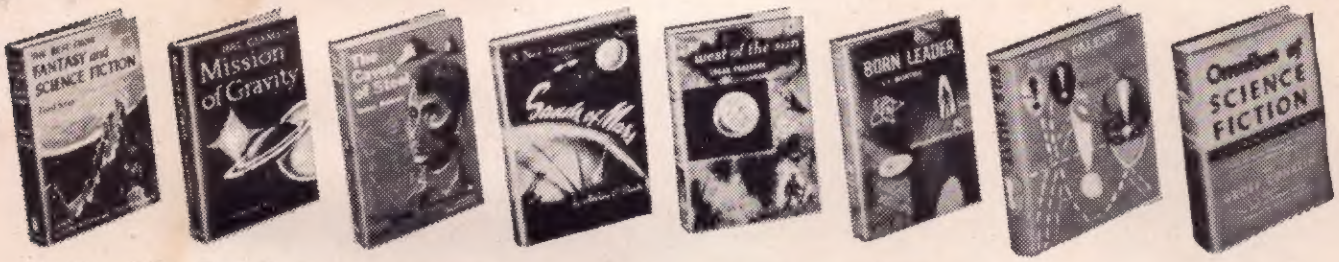

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